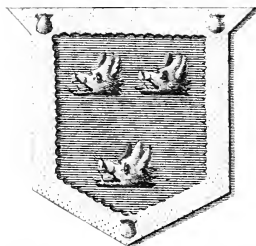


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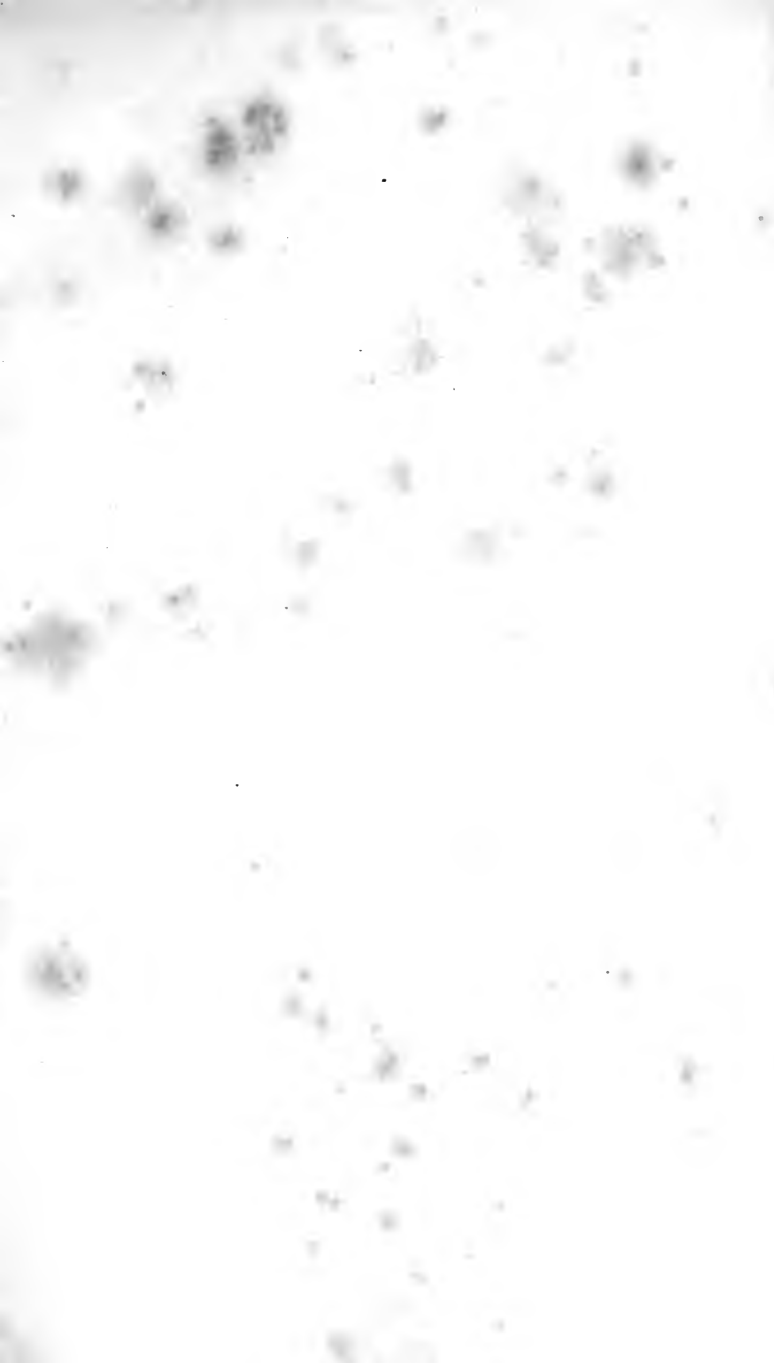


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MAIDS OF HONOUR:

A TALE

OF

THE COURT OF GEORGE I.

"One thing I have got by the long time I have been here, which is, the being more sensible than ever I was of my happiness in being *Maid of Honour*: I wont say 'God preserve me so,' neither; that would not be so well."—SUFFOLK CORRESPONDENCE.

IN THREE VOLS.

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MAIDS OF HONOUR.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEAUTIES AT COURT.

God prosper long our noble King,
His Turks and Germans all.

LORD CHESTERFIELD.

It was an eventful day to the youthful scholars of the estimable Penelope Stiffandstern that was to be distinguished by their presentation at Court. Intense as had been the excitement produced by their discovery of the mysterious letter which had led to their joint promenade of Ham Walk, the intimation that they were on the same day and at the same hour to be introduced to the Royal Family, created a still greater sensation.

The communication from their unknown correspondent, as we have shown, each felt herself obliged by inclination or necessity to keep to herself; and the brief interval that elapsed between its receipt and her proceeding to fulfil its injunctions, was not favourable to its producing any very lasting impression on either. But the anticipated visit to St. James's was a matter of engrossing interest; a matter on which the future fortunes of the fair schoolfellows depended.

The daughter of the Brigadier was perhaps less elated than any of her companions; notwithstanding her father had in a very fatherly lecture disclosed to her the glorious prospect which this introduction at Court opened to her; and the Duchess of Marlborough had called expressly to endeavour to furnish her pretty little head with as much worldly wisdom as would insure her obtaining every possible advantage from so great an honour.

It so happened, however, that there was a simplicity in the nature of Mary Lepel so entirely unselfish, that the paternal lecture and even the worldly wisdom of the great Duchess failed to corrupt it. She might see in her appearance at St. James's an opening to more splendid scenes than

she knew anything about, save through the medium of her favourite romances ; but she thought little of the schemes and manœuvres which were necessary for her successful career in such a place. If imagination did assist her, it was with visions of adventure at least as bright as those that form the staple of "*Le Grand Cyrus*."

The daughter of Lord Bellenden was in raptures. All the resources of her French education would now have an appropriate field for their display ; and she lost no opportunity for rehearsing each irresistible gesture and every impressive expression that were to be brought into requisition for fascinating every one, from the King on the throne to the yeoman at the doors. She let her youthful friends know that the golden days of her Parisian conquests were about to return with increased brilliancy, and that she did not intend to be satisfied till she had brought to her feet at least double the number of adorers of every description that had sighed there in vain during her memorable residence in the delightful French metropolis.

Sophy Howe did not talk so much, but she thought a good deal on the subject. She wondered whether she should meet among the cour-

tiers any man likely to create in her heart those exquisite feelings which she had heard designated by the name of love—a real passion such as should ingross all her womanly sympathies. Under this head she did not class the frivolous attachments Mary Bellenden regarded as conquests, for Sophy Howe was a creature of warm and generous impulses—much too susceptible and much too imprudent for her own peace.

Fanny Meadows neither talked much nor thought much. In fact, she affected great indifference about going to Court, and was not quite satisfied it was a creditable place; nevertheless, Fanny Meadows partook largely of the general excitement, and was extremely curious to know who she was likely to meet, and what sort of people they were.

But the grand subject of debate among the aspirants for Court favour was the dress they ought to appear in; and in the chamber so long devoted to their mutual confidences, long and animated were the discussions respecting the materials, colours and styles they should each adopt. Some awkward irregularities might have occurred had they not agreed to ask counsel from so distinguished a guide in dress as Lady Wortley

Montagu, by whose knowledge and taste they were at last put in the way of appearing according to Court rules.

There happened just then to be no less stir in St. James's than there was at Petersham Manor. The important discovery that had been made respecting the King's intended assassination had excited the whole establishment; and the ministers had been indefatigable, not only in tracing this conspiracy, but in endeavouring to defeat the great movement with which the kingdom was threatened by the friends of the Pretender.

The King was extremely disturbed—rarely allowed the attendance upon him of any one except his two Turkish guards, servants, and gossips. The accounts he received from his ministers were of a most unpleasant nature. He loved to be left undisturbed; yet when alone he was haunted by the pallid countenance we have elsewhere noticed, which intruded upon him in the council chamber, in the apartments of his mistress, and even in the saloons of the palace when he was surrounded by company.

His Majesty was at this particular period far from being in an amiable mood. He was incensed against his ministers; he was terribly

bitter against his son ; he was excessively violent with those of his English subjects who seemed desirous of disclaiming his authority. If he had not been perfectly satisfied that, notwithstanding the extraordinary plucking the country had had since his arrival, it would bear a great deal more, he would have magnanimously turned his back upon it, and set sail for Hanover. But his ambition to be at the head of one of the great powers of Europe was much stronger than his affection for his humble electorate ; therefore his principal minister found no difficulty in prevailing upon him to hold a levée to receive the nobility and gentry desirous of making a demonstration of their loyalty to the reigning family.

Great preparations were made to render this courtly ceremony as imposing as possible ; and Sir Robert Walpole was extremely pressing with all the supporters of his administration to get them to attend. It was a critical period. The country was on the eve of a rebellion, and unless the friends of order and good government were seen round the throne, the kingdom was lost. The palace was made to bear its most royal aspect, and all its inmates were to make as great a display of courtly finery as court etiquette allowed.

The fame of these preparations and the significance of the minister's intimations filled St. James's Street with sedans; indeed so strong a muster was there of these convenient machines, that the special constables and the grenadiers on guard in their sugar-loaf caps and black gaiters, had no slight difficulty in keeping order amongst the noisy chairmen.

The noblemen and gentlemen having escaped from their vehicles with as little damage as possible to their carefully dressed perriwigs, their ample skirts, their gaudy vests, their projecting swords, and their delicate silk stockings—had on making good their entrance at St. James's to force their way up the grand staircase of the palace, ordered and looked after by the proper officers of the household in all the pomp of embroidery and majesty of office.

There thronged country gentlemen of a thousand a year, and wealthy citizens ten times as rich; lord lieutenants of counties, admirals, generals, peers and parliament men, place-hunters, pensioners, bishops, captains and physicians; judges, mayors and corporations, and a whole Noah's ark of curious animals not so easy to classify, unless they were placed as a distinct

body, who sought the interior of St. James's in the full conviction that they were planting their feet on the first spoke of the ladder that should lead them to wealth and distinction.

If it was not very clear what they came for, there could be no question that they assisted materially in thronging the stairs. Indeed, they greatly helped to form such a highly respectable assemblage of the higher classes of England, as it was expected would create a powerful influence in favour of the unpopular sovereign.

During the period of waiting their reception, many of the groups managed to entertain themselves with a little confidential conversation. The subject, notwithstanding the place in which the speakers were, was generally the proceedings of the Pretender; and many were heard to speak very emphatically as to what they intended doing in favour of their honoured sovereign, in case there should be any contest; but of the most confident of these speakers, it so happened there was more than one who was suspected of being in communication with the son of King James, and who had voluntarily come to Court for the express purpose of removing these suspicions.

In the throne room a magnificent scene pre-

sented itself. There was a grand muster of state officials in all their golden trappings : ribbons and stars were in great abundance ; it was altogether a very fine display. The most prominent figure in that splendid chamber was that of the King ; but he seemed to be prominent from the deficiency in his own person of that grandeur which was so ostentatiously put forth by the company. Save the star and George on his breast, and the garter at his knee, the diamond buckles, and the broad ribbon across his chest, no addition seemed to have been made to the snuff-coloured suit in which the reader first beheld him. Nor, after all the care of his principal minister, could his Majesty be persuaded to infuse into his countenance an expression suited to the occasion.

King George stood rather awkwardly before the gorgeous seat that gave its imposing name to the apartment. On his right hand was Sir Robert Walpole, who was placed there with two objects of great political importance : in the first place he was to keep the King in good humour, and in the second, to be ready to give his assistance in making his Majesty understand who was the person presented to him, and what he ought to say. Now this happened to be a much more difficult matter

than the reader is likely to anticipate, for more reasons than one. The first of these, however, happened to be, that his Majesty did not understand a word of English ; and the loyal gentleman who aspired to the honour of presentation, knew just as little of German. This ignorance, unfortunately was shared by the prime minister.

It was awkward enough that the individual who took upon himself the character of interpreter could not pronounce a sentence in the language of one of the two parties ; nay, the King could converse in French, with which his minister, however, was not sufficiently familiar to fulfill the task he had taken upon himself. The usefulness of Sir Robert Walpole in such a position might have been called in question, had he not fortunately discovered that his royal master remembered sufficient Latin to make himself understood ; and as the minister happened to be equally accomplished in this respect, it was expected that the business of the day might go on satisfactorily.

A little way back from the throne stood a group of ministers, lords in waiting, gold sticks, and similar personages, looking dignified and stately, and with a full sense of their own importance.

As the company were admitted, the name of the individual to be presented with that of the nobleman or gentleman under whose auspices he sought such a distinction, having been given to the proper official, they, in their turn, were ushered with all due solemnity and respect to the throne; their names and titles announced, and Sir Robert having made the King aware of who was before him, the royal hand was stretched out as the loyal subject respectfully kneeled and saluted it, and a few gracious words addressed, which lost nothing, and usually gained a great deal in the translation. The parties then moved off to make way for fresh comers.

The proceedings in this manner had been going on as smoothly as the best friends of the House of Hanover could desire; many of his subjects leaving the chamber with a much higher opinion of their sovereign than they had entertained before they entered it. The change arose entirely from some highly gratifying speech which they had been led to suppose the King had addressed to them, yet of which his Majesty unfortunately, was perfectly innocent. Where he knew anything of the parties, he would detain them, and ask questions on matters in which they were inte-

rested ; all which, amplified and much improved by the wonderful skill and tact of the minister, did wonders both for the King and for his government.

But in most instances he knew nothing of the persons before him, and cared less, and seemed inclined to get rid of them as quickly as possible, usually doing so with some remark as rude as it was impolitic. Nevertheless, the sagacious minister, confident he could not be discovered by either, metamorphosed the most discourteous reception into words of honied flattery that made many a secret rebel a good subject for life.

In this way had passed the throne a long train of courtiers of all professions—some known as such, others desirous of being so known—with the leading members of both houses of Parliament—Whigs and Tories being equally prudent in exhibiting their loyalty. Some came to congratulate the King on his recent escape from assassination, others to assure him of their devotion in these troublesome times : some to return thanks for an appointment ; others in hopes of getting one ; and a great number to prove to the minister how ready they were to serve him in any

way not likely to put them to any great inconvenience.

Among the announcements was "the Lord Mayor;" and there advanced towards the King a short, red faced, corpulent man, in all the dignity of robes, gold chain, and other civic insignia, under which he waddled and puffed as though such honours were more than he could carry.

"Heaven and earth, what have we here!" exclaimed the monarch in his German Latinity, "what strange monster is this? Is there a she animal of the same species I wonder? Surely my dominions in England may boast of wonderful productions!"

"His Majesty," said the prime minister, as the Lord Mayor knelt down to pay the customary mark of homage, "has commissioned me to express the extreme gratification he experiences at seeing the chief magistrate of the first city in the British Empire, and the head of the most enlightened corporation in the world; and begs to ask after the health of the Lady Mayoress."

"Bless my heart, Sir Robert, does he?" cried his Lordship with difficulty recovering his perpendicular. "I'm mightily beholden to his Majesty; very much beholden indeed. Please to

tell the King, with my humble duty, my wife's but poorly; she's sadly troubled, poor soul, with a bad pain in her stomach."

"What does the pot-bellied rhinoceros say, Walpole?" inquired the King eagerly; staring at the civic functionary as if he scarcely thought him human.

"He says, please your Majesty," replied the minister in the same high-sounding Roman phraseology, "that the important city and corporation of London, of which he is the Lord Mayor, or civil governor, are devoted to the interests of your Majesty, and are ready to assist to the full extent of their wealth in supporting the rights of the House of Hanover against the machinations of any of your Majesty's enemies."

"Ah! that is as it should be!" cried the Monarch trying to look more gracious; "but if all the good citizens of London are like their Lord Mayor, surely I may consider myself King of the oddest-looking subjects under the sun."

"The King commands me to express to the corporation and citizens of London," added Sir Robert, with a most edifying gravity, "that he fully appreciates their loyalty and zeal, and will do his utmost to advance the prosperity of

their city and prove his respect for its institutions."

"My humble duty to the King, Sir Robert," said the Lord Mayor, his honest rosy face glowing with pleasure, "and tell his Majesty if I catch any of his enemies in the city, I'll make uncommon short work of them." And away waddled his worship, the most loyal of citizens; wondering how people could think of traducing or ridiculing so excellent a Monarch.

The next who presented himself before his sovereign was a dignitary of the church: thin, tall, stiff, severe, almost savage in aspect, which a considerable obliquity of vision did not improve; to this blemish was added the infirmity of deafness which he disclosed by speaking in the tones of a town-crier.

"Surely this is some half-starved raven!" exclaimed the King, scanning the gaunt figure of the new comer; "he looks as if he could pick a bone with anybody, and as though it would be a charity to give him one."

"His Majesty commands me to inform you, Dr. Stifftext," commenced the minister in a high voice, "that he feels the most profound respect for your extraordinary learning; and that in his

estimation your last volume of sermons proves that you are the chief pillar of the establishment, and the brightest ornament of his reign."

"May the Lord grant the King a long life!" replied the prelate with a voice that might have been heard in the ante-chamber. "I am but a humble instrument, a poor creature of clay; but the church I serve deserves my best exertions, and I am proud they have met with his Majesty's approbation." The rigid and very upright pillar of the church stalked away with a far more favourable opinion of the religious principles of his sovereign than he had entertained on entering the palace.

"What monkey is this, Walpole," cried the King as the somewhat foppishly clad, yet elegant figure of the Brigadier General Lepel moved towards his sovereign with all the grace of a practised courtier, "An old monkey too, by all that's abominable! How," added he, "he skips along, looking as pleased as if he were going to a wedding. Why that wig of his must be worth a prodigious deal more than the head it covers: and the gay coat he has on, he could never earn were he to labour till dooms-day."

"Please your Majesty," said the minister in a

peculiarly earnest tone, "I have the honour of presenting to you that brave and skilful officer Brigadier General Lepel, who performed such essential service to your Majesty by securing his regiment to the Hanoverian succession, at the demise of your illustrious predecessor. Your Majesty has not a more trustworthy nor a more efficient officer in your army."

"Oh, ah ! indeed !" exclaimed King George, who was always inclined to notice favourably any of the officers who had shewed zeal or ability in his service. "Brigadier Lepel, eh ! Brave soldier is he ? First time the lion was ever seen in the monkey's skin."

"I am commanded by his most gracious Majesty," gravely commenced the skilful interpreter, as the old beau was gracefully bending to his sovereign, "to express his very sincere pleasure at beholding an officer of such distinction as Brigadier General Lepel ; and to state that he will not lose sight of your claims to his consideration, and will on the first favourable opportunity place you in a position where your zeal, your skill, and your valour may have a proper field for their display."

"I humbly return his Majesty my most grateful

thanks for so delightful a proof of his royal kindness and condescension," answered the Brigadier with a courtier's action and delivery ; " believe me, I shall be but too proud to lay down my life in the King's service."

" Please your Majesty," said Sir Robert, " the Brigadier is ready to expend his whole fortune if necessary in supporting the Protestant succession, and would readily raise a regiment of a thousand men at his own expense to lead against your Majesty's enemies."

" A brave man ! a very brave man !" cried the monarch in evident delight. " Has he any sons in the army ?"

" He has only one child, please your Majesty," answered the minister, who was well acquainted with the Brigadier and his wishes, " and that child, unfortunately for your Majesty's service is a daughter ; but I know from good authority that the young lady is extremely beautiful and remarkably accomplished, and would undoubtedly be considered a great ornament to the Court."

" Oh a daughter ; bah !" cried the monarch peevishly, " I don't want any more women. The Schulenburg and the Kielmansegge satisfy me ;" then as if feeling the propriety of doing something

to shew his sense of the Brigadier's extraordinary loyalty, added, "tell him to bring his daughter to my evening parties: must do something to encourage such a man; but I could never have supposed so good an officer could become so great a puppy."

Brigadier General Lepel was extremely delighted when he heard the royal commands, divested of course of the opinions with which they had been accompanied. He had scarcely removed himself from the presence when it became apparent that something extraordinary was going on at the other end of the chamber, for there was a great stir, and all were looking and as much as they dared were crowding in one direction. The minister was engaged in a manner very similar to the scene just described, in presenting General Howe, who seemed better to satisfy the King's ideas of what a General ought to be; and the trio were too much intent on their own business to pay attention to other matters.

It appeared that this sensation was caused by the entrance of the Princess of Wales, accompanied by four of the most lovely creatures, that, according to the oldest courtiers, had ever been seen within the walls of St. James's. All looked

in astonishment ; such angelic faces, such exquisite forms, decked with such admirable taste, they could not sufficiently admire. Those features seemed to float before them as the creation of a dream ; they could scarcely believe that in a place where ugliness had established its headquarters, it was possible the incomparable beauties in the train of the Princess could have ventured to intrude.

After the Princess and her ladies, at some distance, there followed the Prince and several gentlemen. His Royal Highness was striving to put on a becoming gravity, but it was evident he was in particular good humour, for his dull eyes glistened with pleasure, and his heavy mouth wore a most agreeable smile. He looked towards the young ladies who were attracting every body's attention ; and then he turned and looked into the astonished faces of the gazers, and it was only by the strongest control over his feelings that he could refrain from bursting out into a paroxysm of hearty laughter, such as must have discomposed the gravity of the whole courtly assembly.

The Princess proceeded towards the throne, every one respectfully making way for her, but wondering where she could have found the beau-

tiful creatures by whom she was followed ; and it was not till she had closely approached her Royal father-in-law, that by the disappearance of the old General he was made aware of her presence. His son's consort was much more favourably regarded by him than his son, and on her kneeling to kiss his hand, the King affectionately raised her from the ground and kissed her forehead. Then he asked kindly after her health, and seemed inclined to be extremely gracious and pleasant.

"May I count on your Majesty's goodness so far as to request a favour?" inquired the Princess in her own language.

"Favour!" exclaimed the King, "every one asks favours except you, Princess, and many are vastly attentive that way. But what is it you want ; you don't desire to be made Archbishop, I hope, or Commander-in-Chief!"

"No, please your Majesty," answered the Princess, "I have neither the ability necessary for such distinctions, nor am I likely to ask any office, merely to obtain the emoluments derived from it. In the first place, I wish to present to your Majesty certain young friends of mine, who wish to be allowed to pay their respects to their sovereign."

"Oh yes, certainly, there can be no objection,

if they have not committed themselves against me in any way," said the monarch.

"I will answer for their loyalty," observed the Princess gravely ; then with equal grace and sincerity of manner, she presented one after the other, the four lovely pupils of the peerless Penelope Stiff-andstern, in all the pride of their blushing beauty set off by court robes of the most admirable fashion.

Not one of the fair friends but felt considerable trepidation in the presence of that sovereign of whom they had heard so much ; and although the extreme kindness of the Princess of Wales had gone far towards making them feel at ease in a position so novel, they did not approach the King without some slight disquietude.

The King was taken by surprise, when for the first time he noticed his daughter-in-law's associates. Dull as he was, and insensible as he appeared, he could still feel a sense of the beautiful. As each approached him, he stared with wonder not unmingled with pleasure, and went through the customary ceremony as the name was mentioned to him, in a manner differing widely from his usual apathy, not forgetting to kiss his beautiful subjects on the cheek as he raised them when they sought to kneel before him.

In this way the cold and listless Fanny Meadows had passed the throne. She looked very lovely; but not more animated than a statue. Then followed the warm, and glowing Sophy Howe, on whose more attractive countenance the King looked as though he wished he had been thirty years younger. She was succeeded by Mary Bellenden, with her Parisian graces in full play, on whom he gazed with more curiosity than wonder; but directly the winning, innocent graces of Mary Lepel met his gaze, the expression of quiet admiration that had lit up his stolid countenance, changed into one of extreme astonishment, not unmixed with fear.

“God of Heaven—how marvellous a likeness!” he exclaimed in German, in the excitement of the moment, forgetting where he was; and he drew the trembling, blushing beauty towards him, gazing into her eyes as though there was some magic in them. This strange movement had been caused by one of those reminiscences from the mysterious and guilty Past, which so often troubled his waking thoughts; no matter where he was, or in what way engaged. The King beheld in the lustrous eyes of the Brigadier’s daughter those wells of unutterable affection

from which his spirit, in happier times, had drawn its first draught of happiness.

“Wonderful!—wonderful!” he cried, clasping his hands, and fixing a vacant stare on the fair creature before him.

“Let me present to your Majesty,” said the Princess, with a woman’s tact desirous of removing the King’s evident agitation, by diverting the unpleasant thoughts with which he had been visited, “Mary, the only child of Brigadier-General Lepel; and I can safely add, that your Majesty will find the daughter as admirable a subject, as you must be aware the father is an excellent officer.”

“Oh—ah—yes!” exclaimed the King, somewhat bewildered. “General Lepel; yes, he is a good officer:—has raised a regiment. A very good officer — a good officer. And this charming maiden is his daughter?” The King again gazed fixedly; but not unkindly. “I have told him to bring her to my evening parties. You must bring them all.”

“And now for my favour, please your Majesty,” said the Princess, with an arch-smile.

“Oh, yes!—what is it, Princess? Surely I granted it long ago!” The King added, with-

out taking off his eyes from the youthful beauty.

"No, please your Majesty, for I have not yet mentioned it," said his daughter-in-law. "I crave your Majesty's sanction to my having these young ladies enrolled amongst my immediate attendants."

"There can be no objection," replied the monarch, who in his heart took a particular pleasure in such an arrangement. "They are very proper appointments. All good families ; all loyal, all apparently well-bred. I am pleased you should ask what must be so readily granted. But remember," he added eagerly, "you are commanded to bring them as your personal attendants to my evening parties."

"They shall not fail to attend, when it meets your royal wishes," answered the Princess ; and then, with another affectionate salute to the King, and a courteous recognition to the minister, that amiable lady and her lovely associates passed from before the throne. As Mary Lepel departed, the King looked after her, and sighed. All at once his features underwent a sudden and startling change of expression, as his eyes were directed towards the next person who approached.

From the look of remorse and melancholy those features had worn a moment since, they passed to anger not unmingled with hatred.

"Heaven and earth, Walpole, here comes that rascal of a son of mine!" he exclaimed, in no slight excitement.

"I implore your Majesty to be calm," whispered the anxious minister. "Remember how many eyes are upon you, and all the mischief any public explosion of your Majesty's anger towards the heir apparent might cause," added Sir Robert, urgently.

It was curious to mark the different manner in which the King chose to treat his son, and his daughter-in-law. The Prince came forward carelessly, looking about him as if his thoughts were extremely amused, and as though he did not know, or would not know that he was so near the King. He sauntered up to the throne, and went through the usual ceremony with less appearance of interest than he would have shewn had his Majesty been a perfect stranger. The King put out his hand; but he looked as if he longed to use it against his son's ears. His features were very rarely agreeable; but during the few minutes the Prince was before him, the expression they wore was most forbidding.

That day was a remarkable day at St. James's. It caused a world of gossip and conjecture. The wonderful graciousness of the King's demeanour, and the very kind language he employed; the appearance of the four beauties in the train of the Princess of Wales, and the strange reception the King gave his son, seemed to have set all the tongues in London and Middlesex in such a full tide of gossip as no event had ever produced before. But the new Court Beauties had by far the most important share of the conversation, and the vainest of them ought to have been satisfied with the extraordinary sensation she had made.

CHAPTER II.

KING'S MISTRESSES.

Sufficient wrecks appear each day,
And yet fresh fools are cast away :
Ere well the bubbled can turn round,
Their painted vessel runs aground.

MATTHEW GREEN.

THE first appearance of the four fair school-fellows at the Court of St. James's, not only became the theme of town gossips, town wits, and town gallants, but produced as extraordinary an effect within the palace as without. From the elegant Lord Chamberlain even to the stalwart beef-eaters, comments and speculations out of number were in rapid creation and circulation.

Mahomet and Mustapha were completely of opinion that a small detachment of the houris had escaped from Paradise ; the lords in waiting,

the equerries, the pages, the gentlemen pensioners, and other royal attendants, if not exactly of this way of thinking, were impressed with the conviction that they were more likely to create a Paradise than to have abandoned one. The gold stick was in a fever of admiration; the exon in an ecstasy of astonishment; and from the attics to the scullery scarcely anything for the next four-and-twenty hours was said, done, or thought of, that did not relate in some measure to these beautiful strangers.

But though in every part of the royal edifice this excitement prevailed, there was one portion of the palace where it exhibited very extraordinary features: this portion was known as the apartments of the King's mistresses. There the effect produced was as deep as it was strange. We must take the liberty of transporting the reader to the ordinary sitting room of these royal favourites. It was a square chamber of handsome proportions, and containing much costly furniture; but there was a want of neatness and of harmony in the arrangement and choice of decoration, that proved the absence both of taste and order in the inmates. These consisted of three females.

The first was standing, occasionally stalking backwards and forwards with impatient gesticulations. She was tall and thin, in a rich dress that fitted her badly and became her worse ; but what could have become a face and figure so repulsive ? She looked more like the mummy of a grenadier put into petticoats, than any thing else. A dried up, wrinkled face, coarsely rouged ; a sharp nose and sharper chin ; thin, almost colourless lips and dull-grey eyes, in which the prevailing expression was hypocrisy, although barber and milliner did their best, were not likely to do much credit to their skill ; and as to the form, there was more symmetry in a pitchfork than could have been found in her limbs, were they placed in the most favourable position ; yet that face so withered and repulsive, and that thin and shapeless figure belonged to a King's favourite : they were the face and figure of the all powerful Mademoiselle Schulenburg, or as the wits of the town chose to nick-name her, of "The May Pole." The sallow-faced girl sitting on a cushion was one of her daughters, though she passed for her niece.

The features of her other companion might have given the spectator the idea of the full

moon with a swelled face—had that planet possessed a more florid complexion, with here and there such fiery excrescences as gross feeding and gross tippling are stated to produce. The physiognomy was certainly not characteristic of a Venus, though it might have passed for that deity's cook-maid; but monstrous as was her face, her figure, even as it filled the great chair in which she had deposited her ample proportions, was more monstrous still.

When she stood up she looked like a water-butt, with a woman's head above it, and a woman's dress over it: sitting down she appeared from her shoulders downwards an undistinguishable heap of feminine apparel that had been carelessly thrown over a huge trunk placed on the chair. Yet that face so well known by its brick-dust complexion and staring black eyes; and that figure that had already become a laughing stock to the good people of London, were the face and figure of no less a person than Madame Kielmansegge, another member of the Royal Harem—better known about town by the soubriquet of "The Elephant and Castle," whom we have already introduced as the heroine of a Westminster mob.

It did not appear that either of these important

personages were in any particular good humour. In fact, the Schulenburg looked both sour and solemn; and the features of the other favourite indicated a powerful mingling of fear and anger.

Whether to give her courage or to support her rage, we cannot pretend to say, she had provided herself at the table close to which she sat, with a large Dutch black bottle of Schiedam with the contents of which she seemed to be somewhat familiar.

“I did not think the King could have so far forgotten himself,” observed the thin lady in German, “as to take any notice of such forward chits. But to sanction their appointment, as Maids of Honour to the Princess is not to be endured.”

“It was very thoughtless of him, my dear,” said the other in the same language, in a melancholy tone; “but he certainly not only forgot himself, but what is more strange, he forgot us, who have done so much for him. I don’t like the look of it at all.”

“Nor I,” added the former impressively. “Something must be done or our influence is gone.”

“Yes, something must be done!” repeated the

fat favourite; "but what must it be, and how is it to be done? I know well enough how you and my aunt got rid of his wife, when she became troublesome; but unfortunately we are not now in Hanover; and here are four rivals to be disposed of instead of one."

"Yes, four," said the thin favourite; "but they are mere girls. I think they would not give us much trouble to remove them."

"If we were at the Herrenhausen instead of St James's, that might be," replied the other sharply. "There none could oppose us. None dared to interfere with our designs. Those were golden times for us poor women, laudibly intent on making our fortunes as rapidly as we could. But remember that these creatures who have dared to thrust themselves into the King's notice are taken by the hand by the Princess. We must be very cautious in our proceedings against them."

"We will be cautious, my beloved Kielmansegge," exclaimed the chief lady; "but Providence, who has hitherto been so good to us, will, I have no doubt, support us in this trying juncture. It is a great relief and an especial consolation," she added, turning up the whites or rather

the yellows of her eyes, "to be able to put one's trust in the promises held out to the worst of sinners. I go five times a day on Sundays to my chapel to hear these precious prospects put forth."

"Yes, dearest Schulenburg, your piety is very edifying," observed her companion, drily; "but that sort of thing is not to my taste. I would rather not have to go quite so far for my comfort. I dare say I'm a great deal more sinner than saint; but I will keep on as good terms with myself as I can. It is more agreeable than considering one's-self so very vile." The speaker here proved by the movement of her glass to her mouth, that she was inclined to practice what she preached.

"Ah! those strong waters!" exclaimed the thin favourite. "When will you think less of them and more of your immortal soul? I wish you would go with me to hear that shining vessel, the Reverend Dr. Stifftext."

"Bah!" said the fat favourite, "he is much too noisy a vessel for me. My black-bottle is more to my mind. Its doctrine I never dispute; and it holds forth only just as long as I require it. But if you are too much absorbed in your religious

views, I do not see how we are likely to escape the mischief that threatens us by the intrusion of these baby-faced misses."

"Oh never fear," cried the other, "we are both too deeply interested in keeping the King from any other influence than our own, to sit down quietly while it is being undermined. There are fortunately for us many ways of getting rid of a rival, and what will remove one will remove four; and we can count upon the assistance of Mahomet and Mustapha, who are well used to summary punishments for offenders. Our own preservation requires that we should not stand upon trifles; and if these silly fools are determined to rush upon destruction, they can blame no one but themselves when it overtakes them."

Mademoiselle Schulenburg had dropped the whine and the uplifted gaze, and strode along the apartment with a fierce look and a spirit that boded infinite mischief to the unsuspecting objects of her hatred.

"The King we can make sure of; that is more than half the battle," said her companion encouragingly as she emptied her glass; "we can do with him what we like. The English ministers too are quite subservient, and are not likely to give us

any trouble; but, as this is a matter of great moment, we must not wait while these daring little chits are creating an influence in their own favour. We must get rid of them at once, before their pretty faces produce the mischief they are likely to do us."

"That is good advice, my beloved Kielmansegge!" exclaimed her friend stopping short, "we will get rid of them as speedily as possible, and will arrange the matter with our Turkish friends. It would be flying in the face of that gracious Providence who hath so befriended us in a strange land, were we to neglect those means for getting rid of our enemies of which we can so easily avail ourselves; for, as that inestimable vessel, the pious Stifftext says—"

"Oh never mind what he says," interrupted her fat associate, as she took a powerful draught of her cordial.

"Never mind what he says!" exclaimed the other, uplifting her hands and eyes in a pious horror; "never mind what is said by that good, that holy, that admirable, that matchless preacher! Madame Kielmansegge, I am amazed at your iniquity."

"I did not exactly mean you were not to attend

to him," observed her fellow sinner in a soothing tone, not desiring to provoke her superior to a quarrel. "I intended only to intimate the urgent necessity of your attending to me, as I have something to communicate respecting your interests as well as my own, which just now requires your whole attention."

"Oh business, my beloved Kielmansegge, must not of course be neglected," replied the readily appeased lady, "I suppose you allude to some recently discovered vacancy that we can turn to our advantage."

"Ah, Mademoiselle, how clever you are!" cried her companion chuckling at the rapidity with which her religious friend turned from piety to profit. "This is an excellent country, a very good country indeed for all such adventurous spirits as ourselves, who find their Hanover too limited a field for their exertions. Ah, how well I remember the day I left our beautiful Electorate with the determination of following the King, when you and others of his dearest friends hung back afraid of venturing into a country so strange and barbarous as we considered England to be. This escape was an achievement of no ordinary description, for there were a score or so of wretches in the

shape of people whom I had honoured by getting greatly in their debt, who watched my every motion and waylaid me at every step. I should never have quitted Hanover, as you must be well aware, had it not been for that happy idea of disguising myself as our loyal burgomaster desirous of paying the last duties to my departing sovereign by seeing him on ship-board. I reached England safely; and saving that I have been pelted and hooted in public rather more than is quite agreeable, I have nothing to complain of. But I have a good deal to boast of; and next to that best of good things, money, which comes in with an abundance that would astonish the poor ignorant women we left at home, I can boast of enjoying the choicest Schiedam that ever gave comfort to a woman's heart."

"Tush!" cried the thin favourite impatiently, as she stopped in the walk she had resumed; and a frown made her forbidding features more repulsive. "I know these things well. I was a fool for not starting with the King. But I saw my folly as soon as I heard of your arrival here, and the great things you were doing. I lost little time in endeavouring to repair my error; and, as you know, managed with little difficulty to recover

my influence over the King. With the good understanding now established between us, that acknowledges my possessing the first place in his Majesty's affections, and divides between us the amount of whatever we may be enabled by our peculiar industry to obtain from him or his subjects, I am perfectly satisfied. In short, I must say with yourself, if some of the noisy people of this large city were not so fond of throwing at me the soil of their streets, instead of reserving it for a more profitable use, I should be well content to pass my days here. But you mentioned something about vacancies. What are they? and who are likely to bid for them?"

These amiable members of the royal harem then entered into a long conversation of a nature too business-like to be reported to the reader verbatim; suffice it to say, that it related to several important offices in the gift of the Crown, which had recently become vacant, and they agreed that they would obtain them from the King. Those which produced the highest emolument, they determined to retain in their own hands; for although it might be impossible that they should fulfil the duties of such offices, they expressed themselves extremely willing to do all that they

could do, which was, to receive the pay attached to them.

As this was a conversation on business, it was astonishing in what a business-like manner it was carried on by both the parties so intimately concerned in it. The Schulenburg having drawn a chair to the table, at which the Kielmansegge sat, and helped herself to the favourite stimulant her friend was enjoying, gave a very serious attention to the most minute details of what she heard, and an animated discussion was carried on respecting the exact sum this office ought to bring, and that person ought to pay ; and although some differences of opinion would occasionally be elicited in the warmth of the debate, it was extraordinary with what an amiable consistency they agreed in making the office or the person produce as large a sum of money as it was possible for them to obtain for it.

At last these matters were satisfactorily disposed of ; still the royal favourite, distinguished by the title of "the Elephant and Castle," did not appear inclined to move from her seat, and her meagre contrast seemed desirous of falling back again from business to religion, as she had already commenced alluding to the wonderful labours of

the pious Dr. Stifftext. But although her corpulent coadjutor sat still, there was an air of mysterious meaning, mingled with a powerful sense of satisfaction, in her fat face, that showed she had yet some communication to make, which communication was one of more than usual importance.

The Schulenberg was just on the point of breaking forth on the privileges conferred on the elect, when her sharp and penetrating eyes caught the expression. She saw in a moment there was something of more than ordinary interest forthcoming, and in that moment dismissed from her mind all the thronging ideas of divine recompense that she was then about giving expression to. She gazed intently on her companion—the look was readily understood. The latter smiled as she replenished the two glasses, and there appeared in the broad disk of flesh that was considered to be her countenance, a meaning that greatly excited the other's curiosity.

It did not long remain ungratified, and as Madame Kielmansegge proceeded to develop the nature of her communication, Mademoiselle Schulenburg was soon satisfied that it was one of the most interesting description that had ever passed

between them. Her dull, spiritless eyes glistened with renewed youth, as she learned the golden advantages that were about to be thrown open to her. She never attempted to interrupt her companion; she listened with faculties too absorbed even to admit of the employment of speech.

It is scarcely possible that we can convey to the reader an adequate conception of the glowing picture that the fat lady presented to the lean one; but then it should be remembered that this choice specimen of a King's mistress expressed her ideas in the most graphic words in the German language; and that when a prospect peculiarly advantageous opened itself before her, her words appeared to possess all the obesity of her person, together with a hue as golden as if the native brass of which they had been coined had been treble gilt from the more sterling resources of which she had availed herself so liberally since her arrival in this El Dorado. But all that can be done in "our well of purest English undefiled," towards such a conception, shall be attempted.

Madame Kielmansegge gave her friend to understand that she had formed the acquaintance of a certain Sir John Blunt, an Englishman of fair repute in the commercial world, who was a pro-

digious speculator, and had originated a scheme for enriching every body, that appeared to be the most seductive speculation ever invented. The lady did not appear to be perfectly informed of the exact nature of this wonderful scheme; she understood it only as having some connection with the South Sea. But she was well aware it was to be put forth as an investment for those who could be induced to speculate, which there could be no doubt would return a prodigious interest—something like a hundred-fold for the sum invested.

This Sir John Blunt took care to represent himself as a man of the most extraordinary honesty of principle, possessing a mind gifted with the most enlarged views, and a heart overflowing with the abundance of its liberality. The scheme which he was now bringing forward so prominently originated entirely in his excessive philanthropy. He had noticed how slowly and with what difficulty the industrious portion of the community, with humble means, obtained a competency, and he was determined that so many worthy people should have it in their power to realise a fortune in a much quicker, and in a much easier manner. Nor had he been unre-

gardful of the many risks and the slow returns attendant on the ordinary investments of the more wealthy classes, and his benevolence was equally active in favour of the capitalists. In short, by this plan of his, persons of small means were speedily to become rich, and those already wealthy were to make unparalleled fortunes.

The scheme had so far been attended with success, that many persons of note were known to have become shareholders, and South-Sea Stock had risen to a handsome premium. But this success was far from being sufficient to satisfy the benevolent speculator. He looked for much higher patronage, and a much more extensive investment;—so extensive, indeed, that a cooler observer might have thought his views in no slight degree extravagant.

Honest Sir John Blunt, however, knew extremely well what he was about. He was aware of the influence which the German ladies at the palace exercised over their German sovereign, and having ascertained that influence might be procured, he had sought out Madame Kielmansegge, and after sufficiently mystifying her as to the nature of this South-Sea speculation, he proposed that a handsome reward should be im-

mediately forthcoming, if the King could be brought to patronize it. The name of royalty, he well knew would draw after it the name of nobility; and the throne and the peerage would not long remain his patrons before a creditable muster of powerful and wealthy commoners would be found thronging to their ranks.

Madame Kielmansegge had listened as attentively to Sir John Blunt as she was now being listened to. She soon perceived it was a matter which could not be settled without the intervention of her superior; and deferred making any arrangement until she had been consulted. An ordinary case of traffic in government offices, she might have ventured to conclude by herself; but this affair promised to be an example of corruption on so grand a scale, she liked not the responsibility of determining the amount of the bribe: therefore she had, as soon as possible, placed her friend in possession of all the important particulars; and now having greatly refreshed herself with many an ample glass, awaited with some anxiety her decision.

Mademoiselle Schulenburg heard the glowing statement we have condensed with an attention worthy of a lady of her experience in corrupt

practices ; and after a little time spent in earnest reflection, came to the resolution of having some conversation with this benevolent gentleman. He had left an address with Madame Kielmansegge where he could be found, which as it happened to be a celebrated chocolate house in St. James's Street, a trusty Mercury in the shape of the sagacious Mahomet was at once despatched to him with a message requesting his company at the palace.

While the Dutch bottle and the other little evidences of conviviality were being put away, and in the apartment of the King's mistresses something resembling a respect for appearances attempted to be established, we must change the scene of our narrative to the public room of a celebrated house, that stood very near the spot now occupied by the gorgeous mansion that testifies to the taste, the enterprise, and the good fortune of that prince of fishmongers, the late Mr. Crockford.

But this was no imposing edifice with a palatial front, brilliant with plate glass, but a plain brick structure with common glazed windows ; nor could the interior boast of any thing in the remotest degree resembling the gorgeous furniture

and decorations to be found in the more modern establishment. Our great grandfathers were but very little less gregarious than the new generation. They had clubs of many descriptions, besides a variety of places to which those who were of the same politics were fond of resorting ; but they knew nothing of the luxury and the taste for display which exist so prominently in the " Houses of Call" established by their descendants in some of our fashionable thoroughfares.

The house to which the messenger of the King's favourites had been despatched, was scarcely to be distinguished from its neighbours, except by the little throng of gentlemen who in fine weather were to be seen lounging at the door, and at other seasons gossiping at the windows of the public room. This room was visited by many persons of note, ostensibly to drink chocolate, which caused such places to be called "Chocolate Houses;" but in reality it was a place of union for hearing and discussing the news of the day, where the gossip, the wit, and the politician were sure to be found in full activity.

The furniture of the room was exceedingly unpretending : there was an open space in the centre,

in front of the large fire-place; while all round the walls were tables of a size to accommodate five or six persons, with benches having backs to them on each side. There were also to be seen a few plain, broad-backed, arm-chairs, the seats and backs covered with leather, which were considered to be for the sole use and benefit of certain frequenters of the chocolate house looked up to by the rest as personages of considerable authority and influence.

In one of these seats of honour an individual had established himself, whose name was beginning to be much talked of by two very distinct classes of people, the money-making citizen, and the money-spending man of fashion. He was believed to be immensely rich, and he was thought to be in possession of the means of making others as immensely rich as himself. Despite the excitement then prevailing in the public mind respecting the doings of the Pretender and his partisans; in the two classes of people we have named, there existed a considerable degree of interest towards the South Sea scheme, and its extraordinary projector.

The occupier of the chair was to all appearance a man worthy of all honour and confidence.

The true spirit of benevolence must surely have had its appropriate resting-place in his ample forehead, and the clear complexion and honest open countenance, which a settled aspect of kindness made more prepossessing, seemed to fix the stranger's confidence at once. There was, however, a peculiarity in his manners that did even more in his favour than his trustworthy countenance. This consisted in a plainness of speech that appeared to disdain any artifice; and this freedom from the ordinary cajoleries of speculators was as evident in his person as in his language. He wore everything in a plain and unpretending style, from his wig to his shoe-buckles; and in everything about him, apparently was desirous of showing his abhorrence of all kinds of deception and delusion.

He was a middle-aged man, rather stout and tall; in short, just such a man in aspect and figure as was likely to make a favourable impression on those by whom it was most to his interest to be thought well of: and as he sat in the seat accorded to him near the fire, there were very few of the frequenters of the house, many of whom were persons of distinction, who observed him without feeling prepossessed in his favour.

Such was Sir John Blunt, the originator of

the South Sea scheme ; a scheme, by the way, on the subject of which he scarcely ever was known to open his mouth at the chocolate house : but he took care it should not suffer from his silence ; for he had in his employ plenty of mouths ready to give the subject all the scope it admitted of. Persons known to possess money were sure, by some channel or other, to hear of all the wonderful advantages Sir John Blunt had at his disposal ; and when they were in company with the speculator, they saw he was so little desirous of deluding them, he invariably met their advances as if he did not wish them to risk their money in such an undertaking. This line of conduct did him very important service.

The room in which he sat did not possess more than half its usual number of occupants ; but they were dropping in by twos and threes, so as to make it apparent that before long the apartment was likely to be tolerably crowded. Many young men of fashion were amongst them, and not a few old men of fashion ; and the greetings they gave each other were loud, and usually anything but ceremonious. They took their customary seats, called for their customary beverage, and if they did not group together near the win-

dows or the fireplace, took their newspaper into a corner, and at once proceeded to make themselves masters of its intelligence.

There was a confused hum of voices going on, from the loud oration of the political oracle, to the subdued whisper of the retailer of scandalous gossip; but two circles appeared to be in most active conversation in different parts of the room. One consisted of some ten or a dozen persons, the greater portion of whom were known to be hangers on of the principal ministers, who were descanting in an extremely confident tone on the projects of the Pretender, and the measures taken by government to defeat them.

Some of these appeared to be prodigiously loyal, if any reliance could be placed on the abuse they lavished on the individual who had put himself forward to dispute the title of the British throne with George I, and in the horror they wished it to be thought they entertained of the Pope and of every thing papistical. Others were less zealous; no doubt impressed with the value of not committing themselves too far with one party, till they were certain the other had not a chance of making them suffer for it.

The other circle consisted of gay men of the world, for whom politics had less interest than the voice of the last singer, or face of the last beauty. Amongst them the conversation was not less animated, but the subject on which they conversed so eagerly admitted of a good deal of collision of individual tastes and impressions ; for it was the claims of the four youthful beauties who had so recently been presented at Court. Every one had something to say respecting them and their attractions, and this something was sure to be eulogy of the most extravagant kind very energetically expressed.

The discussion was maintained with all the zeal of new made partizans, for each of the young ladies had made partizans who seemed as ready to support her claims to be the reigning toast of the town, as though they were her sworn advocates. Even the cold and distant Fanny Meadows had obtained admirers, whose eloquence did her charms ample justice ; but she had fewer advocates than the seductive Sophy Howe, who discussed her pretensions in a strain that must have greatly delighted that sensitive young lady.

The great contest, however, lay between the

more numerous advocates of the superior pretensions of the two Marys ; and it seemed at one time as though the more fully developed graces of the accomplished daughter of Lord Bellenden were weighing down the child-like purity of the less sophisticated daughter of the Brigadier ; but an old beau, whose opinion on feminine beauty had all the weight which extensive experience should give, very sententiously and most convincingly supported the claims of her fresher and more exquisite loveliness, and a majority of votes having been obtained, Mary Lepel was pronounced to be “The Toast of the Town”—a pre-eminence that her name-sake Lady Mary Wortley Montagu had so long maintained successfully against all comers.

Just as the conclave had come to this decision, a stranger was seen to enter the apartment, who was immediately recognised as one of the King’s favourite Turks. He walked with that impressive gravity for which he was so remarkable, towards the place where sat Sir John Blunt ; his neat but plain suit easily pointing him out amongst his more gaily dressed associates as the great speculator.

Mustapha approached him, and in a low voice

intended exclusively for his ear, uttered a few words. The communication did not seem to produce much effect. The fact was, Sir John was prepared for it; and in a quiet manner making his excuses to a staid old gentleman with whom he had been conversing, as having received a summons he could not delay a moment in fulfilling, he followed the swarthy messenger into the street.

It was scarcely possible that any thing could have happened likely to produce so strong an impression in favour of the rising South Sea Stock, as this evident summons from the King to Sir John Blunt. Almost as soon as the door closed upon his footsteps, it became the subject of general conversation. Those who had hitherto paid little attention to the scheme, now listened attentively to the golden prospect it held forth, and the fast growing impression that the King was going to embark in it induced a desire in almost every one present to obtain its advantages for himself.

The great speculator might very well afford to pay handsomely for the co-operation of the King's ugly mistresses, for the belief that his Majesty had invested largely in South Sea Stock, which

throughout the day continued to gain strength, gave such an impulse to this new investment, that it rose in value twenty per cent before the conclusion of the next day.

CHAPTER III.

ROYAL MUSIC.

I've heard that things inanimate have moved,
And, as with living souls have been informed,
By magic numbers and persuasive sound.

CONGREVE.

WE read in story books, that we believe have not entirely gone out of fashion, of a certain personage who was possessed of a pair of boots, that enabled him to get on in his journey with much the same facility afforded the traveller of these degenerate days by a special train. It is often necessary for the author to get over his ground with the same rapidity, and as his seven-leagued boots pass over time as well as space, of course the employment of them is often of double advantage to his narrative.

To this rapid progress we must now beg to have recourse, and we therefore make this convenient step from the last chapter to the present. We must however give a hasty glance at certain changes and proceedings, which occurred in the interval we find it necessary to stride over, so that the reader may be prepared for their influence upon this story, and the characters who figure in it.

In the first place, though King George I. had not particularly raised himself in the estimation of his people, the wisdom of his able minister, Sir Robert Walpole, and the energy of his colleagues had succeeded in quelling the rebellion which was agitating the kingdom from one end to the other. The conspirators had been baffled. The wily Bolingbroke had availed himself of the first favourable opportunity of escaping to the continent, and quickly established himself as the secretary of the man he chose to regard as his lawful prince ; an office of which he was soon as heartily tired as he then became of the cause he had embraced.

The Bishop of Rochester had not been so fortunate. He was apprehended on a charge of high treason, in his lodgings in Westminster, an

committed as a prisoner to the Tower. Various persons associated with him were deprived of their liberty at the same time, and there were several whose fate was still more deplorable. They had been hurried into appearing in arms and making a warlike demonstration in favour of the Pretender, which ended in their falling into the power of the government against which they had rebelled; many subsequently atoning for their guilt on the scaffold, and many more suffering its penalty in the shape of forfeiture and imprisonment.

The opinion of the great Duchess had been prophetic. She wisely kept aloof from the ill arranged movement as soon as she had obtained an insight into its true nature, and was discreet enough to get as much as possible out of the way of mischief, by retiring to Blenheim just as the explosion was about to take place. Notwithstanding, however, her refusal to join with the Pretender's friends, she was as far as ever from favouring the family on the throne. The slight that she chose to consider had been shewn her illustrious husband by the new King had prejudiced him irretrievably in her eyes. She amused herself by superintending the building at Woodstock, still

going on in the stupendous structure a grateful nation had desired to see raised to one of the greatest of her heroes, and by abusing every thing and every body that happened to attract her Grace's observation.

George I. did not become more popular for the beheadings and imprisonments he had inflicted ; nor did his conduct in any particular degree become more likely to gain him the esteem of his English subjects. He still allowed his Turks to be more in his confidence than his ministers ; and suffered merit and worth to pass unnoticed, whilst he squandered wealth and distinctions on his ugly mistresses, and his little knot of Hanoverian counts and barons. Their power had increased, and was increasing.

We may as well state here that the Marquis of Dorchester received his promised Dukedom, and will henceforth figure in this story as the Duke of Kingston. Another favour he received from government at the same time, for the support of himself and his family, came in the distinction conferred on his son-in-law as ambassador to the Sublime Porte. And Lady Mary Wortley Montagu had astonished all her friends by accompanying her husband on his travels to the domi-

nions of the Grand Signor, whence intelligence of her had already arrived that amazed some, and scandalized others of her acquaintances.

The elegant Philip Dormer still retained his position in the household of the heir apparent, notwithstanding that his father was considered to be greatly in the confidence of the King, which excited considerable observation, as the jealousy with which his Majesty regarded all his son's friends was well known; but this would have greatly lessened had it been known that the King was a party to the arrangement. The father and son, who were both courtiers of the most orthodox character, having given him to understand that no arrangement could be so much to his Majesty's interest.

It will easily be believed that George I. continued to pass much of his leisure time in the company of his extremely unprepossessing harem; and that no opportunity was lost by them of practising upon his prejudices, and profiting by his supineness. Their interview with the now far-famed Sir John Blunt had been made most advantageous to them. They knew well the value of their services to so bold a speculator and put an immense price upon it; and all the

worthy knight's respectable appearance and bland demeanour did not make them inclined to lower it.

Sir John tried every manœuvre to bring them down to more moderate terms ; but finding his exertions in that way unavailing, and his promises and professions disregarded, he was wise enough to give in to their demands. Dearly, however, as he paid for their assistance, he soon found it to be the best of the many arrangements of the kind he had made. The King bought largely of South-Sea Stock ; the courtiers of course followed his example :—all greedy to profit by the immense advantages held out to them. The Prince was seized by the same mania ; the principal nobility followed ; the gentry began to rush at the same golden bait ; professional men, merchants, farmers, clerks—in short all classes of men invested large sums in South-Sea Stock, and it rose to such a value as no stock had ever attained before.

The excitement on the subject prevailing throughout the country was intense. Every one talked of it to the exclusion of all other matters whatever ; and there was scarcely an individual who had funds in his possession, who was not

eager to invest them in a speculation offering such enormous profits.

By some extraordinary transformation Sir John Blunt had ceased to be the very quiet and unassuming personage that used to take his seat in the chocolate house in St. James's Street. He dressed as splendidly as any nobleman, was still courteous and affable; but it was with the courtesy of a prince; kept a magnificent establishment; was known by his handsome equipage, and splendid liveries; became a Member of Parliament; a potentate at home, a patron at various places, and a great man every where.

South-Sea Stock was engrossing public attention to the exclusion of every thing else. High and low, rich and poor, civil and military—all classes and conditions appeared as if they talked of nothing else, thought of nothing else, and dreamed of nothing else. There was a wild and delirious fever rioting in the blood of hundreds of thousands of industrious and saving people, who were desirous of sharing in the good fortune of the thousands whom, as it was confidently stated, it had already enriched. Neither sex nor age, station nor profession, was free from the fierce anxiety which love of gain engenders.

The Princess of Wales had completely succeeded in her scheme to raise her consort in the public estimation at the expense of his father. The four youthful Maids of Honour she had selected did wonders in creating an impression among the people in favour of herself and the Prince; and the striking contrast so readily perceivable in the suite of the King, and in that of the heir apparent was eagerly seized upon and made the most of. The German frights, rich and powerful as they had become, were rather less in favour, if possible, than they had previously been; and the Court Beauties, with nothing but their youth and loveliness to recommend them, were as popular as they could be.

The noble position these young ladies had gained, affected them variously. Fanny Meadows had heard stories extremely prejudicial to the inhabitants of palaces, and she seemed to have entered St. James's with an immensity of fear of the perils and dangers which a young and lovely woman could incur; she therefore thought it incumbent on her to be particularly prudent, not only on all she herself said and did to any one, but in all any one said and did to her. And this extreme circumspection occasionally became very ridiculous.

Sophy Howe was altogether of an opposite way of thinking, feeling, and acting. The atmosphere of a Court seemed to exhilarate her far beyond the bounds of prudence; and a nature, as we have said, much too susceptible for its owner's peace of mind, left itself open to the influence of admiration without the slightest caution, and heedless of anything beyond the strong pleasure of the moment. Her large, sleepy eyes, became humid with impassioned tenderness; her pouting lips acquired a richer crimson—there seemed to be a softer warmth in her sunny complexion, and her full bust appeared to be swelling to a fulness that no ordinary boddice could control.

It was Mary Bellenden, however, who was evidently most at home at Court. She was in her element. A Maid of Honour at the Court of St. James's was a position exactly suited to her, and the inappreciable accomplishments of which she was mistress. What a field was here for the display of the peculiar learning she had acquired at the Convent of St. Omer, and the precious graces she had brought with her from Paris; and how readily she availed herself of it!

Lords of the bedchamber, grooms of the stole, gold sticks, and equerries, were all allowed to appreciate her Parisian fascinations; and even when

an occasion offered, she would venture to delight the King's ministers with her choicest French phrases, and the most eloquent of her little shrugs, nods, shakes of the head, and all her other pretty pieces of pantomime. Indeed, she had soared still higher; for her residence in Paris, if according to her own statement, it had procured her the notice of a French Prince, now taught her to employ her attractions with equal effect upon an English one.

But how fared the less experienced Mary Lepel when she found herself in so proud a position? The lessons she had got by heart out of her favourite romances formed her code of laws. It is true the Duchess of Marlborough had endeavoured to instruct her in the inviolable rules of etiquette; but unfortunately her instructions partook so much of tirades against every one in any way distinguished at Court, that the Brigadier's daughter could scarcely understand anything from them but that the persons with whom she was about to associate were the most ignorant, incompetent, shallow-minded, self-conceited incapables that could be found in the whole world.

Poor Mary Lepel, therefore, was obliged to rely on her reading, and on the native purity of

her mind, for guidance in such a place. The first gave her but scanty information, as among all the long list of heroines with whom she had formed an acquaintance, not one had ever held the office of Maid of Honour at the Court of St. James's. The latter, though a quality the least in fashion with the sovereign and those who boasted most of his favour, was to be her only help; and fortunately for her was it that she had such a help to fall back upon.

It cannot be expected that four such beautiful creatures as the new Maids of Honour should remain long in a place so well established as the head-quarters of gallantry, without their attracting to themselves much admiration. There were at this time many noblemen and gentlemen attached to the persons of the sovereign and the heir-apparent, who were by no means disinclined to occupy their leisure by laying siege to the hearts of such graceful associates; and amongst them might be found more than one who in person and in manners was well qualified to make a powerful impression upon them.

The Princess of Wales, though apparently much given to the most abstruse studies, and the society of philosophers, was possessed of a heart

that loved to throw facilities in the way of those around her being happy after their own fashion, and she was ready at all times to favour any frolic or assist in any pleasure they were desirous of enjoying. So far from throwing any obstacles in the path of the ladies and gentlemen who were particularly attentive to each other, she seemed to take a delight in encouraging their attachments, and was continually setting on foot some plan for increasing their happiness.

It is not surprising, then, that unchecked by their royal mistress, three of our young Maids of Honour should speedily have gathered about them a tolerably large circle of adorers, whose rival claims upon their favour they showed no disposition to dispose of too summarily. In the case of Fanny Meadows there was a great deal of mischievous pleasantry in the behaviour towards her of several of the gay courtiers. They quickly perceived her foible, and amused themselves by practising upon it. According to her firm belief, never was woman in such dreadful danger as she had existed in since her enviable dignity had been conferred upon her.

Sophy Howe possessed admirers of a different kind, and much more to be dreaded. They were

handsome, gay, licentious men, who sunned themselves in her alluring smiles, and emboldened as much as warmed by them, strove eagerly with each other who should possess themselves of a treasure which appeared so easy an acquisition. The imprudent Sophy listened to their intoxicating flatteries with far more attention than they deserved, till her senses were excited to a happy delirium that banished far out of sight all prudential considerations. She was light-hearted, thoughtless, and giddy, and much too ready to trust to appearances.

Mary Bellenden never wanted admirers ; and her education had been too carefully completed to leave her in ignorance as to the best method of managing them. She never allowed the fondest speeches or the prettiest compliments to touch her feelings. She took them as words of course ; but only a little more impressive than “ How do you do,” and “ Good day.” She had been used to admiration, and not likely to be bewildered by it, however powerful it might be. Nevertheless, for all this unimpressiveness, this vanity, and this affectation, the daughter of Lord Bellenden possessed many good qualities which only wanted a fair occasion for development.

MAIDS OF HONOUR.

Mary Lepel attracted the attention of the wiser and better class of courtiers. There was something in the classical beauty of her features, and the deep spirit of truth beaming out of her dove-like eyes, that kept the licentious at a distance. They looked upon the expression that made her youthful countenance so exquisite; and passed on with the same feeling with which they would regard an unrivalled statue or an inimitable picture.

Those who were the least tainted with the vices of the age thronged around her to offer their homage, and were supremely blessed could they win a smile, or elicit a gracious word. The object of their attentions, however, showed for none of them such partiality as must have filled the rest with despair. Philip Dormer took upon himself the position of chief of this adoring throng; perhaps he considered his devotion deserved precedence from its early exhibition at Petersham Manor, with the felonious perils it had brought upon him; but though the strong tendency to romance led the Brigadier's daughter to regard with something resembling interest, the young nobleman who had figured so prominently in her first adventure, there was no indication in her behaviour of any very strong partiality.

As for the young gentleman, though inclined to be most attractive to his fair coadjutors in the royal household, they did not choose to let him off unscathed for the tricks which, as the Prince's ambassador, he had thought proper to play upon them; and seldom did they lose an opportunity of reminding him in some particular mischievous manner of his several metamorphoses.

The satisfaction diffused, with a few exceptions throughout the palace, at the appointment of our young friends was very great indeed; but no one could have felt it in a greater degree than the Prince. His enjoyment was of the most intense description. Under the influence of his gratification his rather inexpressive features became remarkably pleasant as he gazed from one to the other of the young and beautiful creatures he had succeeded in appending to the Court. Like a bee near some rare exotics, he seemed to hover about the extraordinary attractions around him, uncertain on which to settle.

At present his gallantry was less evident than his delight in the idea of the excessive mortification he had made his father's mistresses endure. His eyes flashed with the most genuine pleasure; and he rubbed his hands briskly as he considered the effect the introduction and residence at Court

of such attractive creatures must have created on those hateful old women.

The Prince did them no injustice in believing that the fat and lean associates in the King's favour were well inclined to strangle every one of the youthful Maids of Honour, and would have done so, could they have effected it with safety to themselves. They had debated the matter with their Turkish and Hanoverian friends, and had sought to effect something with their indulgent sovereign ; but the one shook their heads, and recommended patience and caution instead of the bow-string or the sack ; and the other, whenever they began to hint, to slander, and to destroy, paid no attention to what was said, and struck out another subject for conversation.

The King indeed, whatever was the degree of influence possessed over him by his sordid and repulsive mistresses, did not choose to conceal the favourable impression that had been made upon him by the fair attendants on his daughter-in-law ; and whenever the Princess entered his Majesty's apartments, if she did not have them in her train, he would inquire very impressively after them, and request her to bring them on his next private assembly.

These evening parties in the private apartments of the King were as pleasant things as could have been obtained when some unpleasant company formed a conspicuous portion of the attendants. There was generally a little music, and a little cards, his Majesty occasionally joining in both ; for he assumed a certain degree of musical knowledge, and a slight acquaintance with the bass viol ; and it appeared as if he could most completely forget the secret trouble, with which he was so constantly visited, when sitting before his music desk with his favourite instrument between his knees, sawing away at some favourite concerto, assisted by a few select amateur musicians either from his own family or the most favoured of his ministers. The Princess of Wales usually presided at the harpsichord—the Prince was rarely present ; but he did occasionally assist. The Duke of Newcastle took the first violin ; the Duke of Devonshire the tenor ; and Philip Dormer the German flute—other performers and other instruments sometimes joining in the concert.

It was considered a great privilege to be invited to these royal musical meetings, and it was thought an especial honour to be commanded to assist at them. The only persons present were

the Royal family, the King's Hanoverians male and female, a limited circle of noblemen attached to the sovereign, and the customary attendants on his Majesty and the Princess. The highly honoured few who belonged to the orchestra had by no means an easy task; for, however able they might be on their several instruments, it was necessary that they should attend less to them than to that of their sovereign.

It so happened that the King had his own notions of time and tune, which were frequently at variance with the established ones; and as his Majesty performed for his own amusement only, and possibly with some idea of gaining instruction, he never scrupled to go over a passage two or three times, and to take any liberties, and to make any blunders that seemed good to him, without consulting or in any way warning the rest of the orchestra. It therefore became essentially necessary for every member of it while giving his eyes to his own music, to give his ears to the King's, and as rapidly as possible follow the deviations and eccentricities of the royal performer. By constant practice this difficulty became comparatively easy, and all managed to keep pretty well together till the conclusion of

the piece; but it had more than once happened that very strange effects arose in the course of the performance which the composer had never dreamt of.

On one occasion it became apparent that the concerto was going wrong; but the most acute of these select amateurs could not imagine where they were in error. The royal bass viol was proceeding on its course as sedately as the march of an elephant. The violin looked in vain backwards and forwards for several bars to see where he could glide in; he could discover nothing resembling what he heard. The tenor knowing there was a difficult passage just passed over, and being well aware of the royal practice with regard to such, boldly went back and repeated it; the harpsichord believing the time had been altered from fast to slow, slackened its pace; and the flute entertaining a different opinion went away at double speed.

Such a strange medley was never heard before; nevertheless the King was seen leaning forward with his eyes fixed on his music, grave as a judge with the black cap on his head, working away with the Royal elbow, evidently too absorbed in his own performance to heed the confusion that

distracted the audience, and made the other musicians feel extremely uncomfortable. It was not etiquette to take any notice of the King's mistakes, and although the youthful Maids of Honour, and some of the younger courtiers would have laughed had they dared, they were obliged to stand up in their appointed places, and look as unconcerned as they could.

The Duke of Newcastle, who was a particularly studious courtier, and believed he had made himself very agreeable to his sovereign, trembled for the favour with which he was regarded. He had tried all plans. He had played a few notes here and a few notes there; he had ventured to whisper to the Duke of Devonshire, who was in as great a fright as himself; he had nudged Philip Dormer, whose blowing had become more fast and desperate; he had taken a glance at the music book of the Princess without obtaining the slightest glimpse of the nature of the error which had got them all into such inextricable disorder, and every moment he was becoming more bewildered and more incapable of knowing what he was about. Still like the rest he played on, and fancying matters could not be made worse than they were, he began to ply his bow

with all the rapidity he could put into his execution, fully assured that the sooner he arrived at the end of the concerto the better it would be for him.

All at once all were brought to a stand still by an exclamation from the King, who seemed wonderfully astonished that he should have got to the conclusion of the piece whilst his companions were labouring on, as it then became apparent to him, in anything rather than a good understanding one with another. The Duke of Newcastle turned pale, the Duke of Devonshire looked ill at ease; Philip Dormer was striving as desperately to appear calm as he had a moment since been to get his flute to its proper place. The Princess looked as much astonished as her father-in-law. The Hanoverian portion of the audience glanced at each other—a kind of telegraph known only to themselves—and the rest of the company were in various states of wonder, bewilderment, and suppressed mirth.

“Why, papa,” exclaimed the Princess, who was the only one who dared speak, “you have turned over two leaves at once!”

“Bless my heart, Caroline, so I have,” replied the King referring to his music-book. The

frightened musicians breathed again; but they were allowed little time for composure, for without premonitory word or sign from the performer, the royal bass viol was heard commencing the missed pages, and harpsichord, violin, tenor and flute were at work again in a moment. The quintette proceeded much more satisfactorily. To be sure they were obliged to make a jump back, and a slide forward now and then, but his fellow performers most loyally kept close to their sovereign in all his difficulties, and had the satisfaction of being together at the closing bar.

“I think that went very well, Newcastle,” said the King in French, sedately tuning his instrument.

“Extremely well, your Majesty,” replied his obsequious first violin as he rosined his bow. His Grace had never been in such a fright in his life, and his feelings now were of the most felicitous description. “Your Majesty played with extraordinary precision. I never heard the bass viol in any concerto produce such admirable effect. I appeal to the taste of Mademoiselle Schulenburg to confirm my opinion.”

Now the particularly lean and ill favoured favourite of the King possessed about as much

taste in music as she could boast of personal attractions; but the Duke of Newcastle never failed to pay court to her, knowing how much her good opinion would serve him in retaining that of his sovereign.

“Yes indeed,” replied the lady, “in your Majesty’s hands the instrument is wonderfully effective. It is rare to hear such skilful performance. I am enraptured with the beautiful tones your Majesty produces; it is quite charming, is it not, Madame Kielmansegge?” added she in German to her stout friend.

“Oh divine!” replied that lady pressing her fat hands together in a seeming ecstasy; her burning face looking for all the world as if it had just escaped from some publican’s sign of the Rising Sun. “But the King is a wonderful musician.”

“Wonderful!” exclaimed Count Bernstorff, a sinister looking little man at her elbow. He had been useful to the King before he quitted his electorate, in a manner that gave him a claim to further employment when anything was required where absence of what people more nice in their notions of honour called scruples of conscience, was a recommendation.

“Wonderful indeed!” added Count Robethon in a like fervour. Count Robethon was another Hanoverian adventurer, equally zealous in his master’s service, and equally ready to do anything that might be required of him.

“The King’s skill is only to be rivalled by his judgment,” sententiously observed another foreign favourite in the same circle. This was Baron Bothmar, the greatest of all the great men who had left Hanover with their Elector, and who was fully impressed with the opinion that he alone was qualified to take the post of prime minister in England; and in the plenitude of his influence over the new King took care on all occasions to be extremely insolent in his behaviour to Sir Robert Walpole and his English coadjutors, whom the Baron and his countrymen looked upon as occupying places they had come to England expressly to fill.

“Indeed now, it was vastly pretty music;” exclaimed the Duchess of Bolton who was close to the royal party, “and for a King I think his Majesty plays uncommonly well.”

The King laughed at the equivocal compliment, but he was always amused by the blunders of this eccentric, yet honest hearted daughter of the unfortunate Duke of Monmouth.

It was not etiquette for the Maids of Honour or any of the attendants to talk at these evening parties unless first addressed by the King, or some one of the most privileged of the company. This was a great restraint to more than one, who liked as little not being permitted to talk as not being permitted to be talked to. The amiable Princess was not unmindful of this ; and after her concerto had concluded, and she saw that the King was engaged conversing with a circle of obsequious listeners, she passed to where her young attendants were grouped together, all weary of the very little they had to do there, and soon set them at their ease and their tongues at liberty. She had very quickly about her a circle of young people of both sexes, with whom she kept up a most animated conversation.

The King had got into an argument, or rather into a declaration, for there could be no arguing with a King respecting the superiority of German over English music, and as he gave his opinion he could not mentally avoid recurring to the time when he heard all the music that gave him this impression of the superiority of the songs of his own country ; the place where it was made familiar to him ; and, more than all, the person

from whose delicious voice those melodious songs had proceeded.

“The English have no musical taste,” said Baron Bothmar very confidently, and in a manner to show he thought them scarcely worthy of being alluded to. “They have nothing in the shape of music that has the least pretensions to be called musical.”

“Nothing at all,” added Count Bernstorff.

“Nothing at all,” echoed Count Robethon.

“They seem much too fond of all sorts of discordant noises,” observed Madame Kielmansegge, with an unpleasant remembrance of the unpopular displays she always met with when recognized. “I never heard of anything so abominable.”

“Nor I,” said Mademoiselle Schulenburg, looking vehemently angry from similar experiences. “They are in general more like so many wild beasts ; always howling and yelling.”

“I know of no people so barbarous,” exclaimed the Baron, who had more than once tasted the flavour of London mud, and therefore could talk feelingly ; “they are extremely ignorant, and I should say have no taste whatever for anything intellectual.”

“No idea of such a thing,” said Count Bernstorff.

"None whatever," added Count Robethon.

The Duke of Newcastle was too good a courtier to attempt a defence of his countrymen against such opponents, and the Duke of Devonshire did not think there was any necessity for his doing so. But the Duchess of Bolton was not to be influenced by such policy.

"So it isn't musical we are!" she exclaimed, turning from one to the other with a stare of genuine astonishment. "Oh, thunder and ages, what a mighty strange discovery it is you are making; and all the whilst haven't we got bushels of songs, and tunes, and jigs, and all manner of music that might make any other people as proud as so many peacocks—so it would. And we're brute bastes, are we? and have no taste, and no intellectuality, and are extremely ignorant into the bargain. Well, that is news at all events; and wonderfully obliged to ye I am, for one."

"But your Grace misunderstands," said the Duke of Newcastle, who wished to prevent any altercation in the King's hearing. "The Baron alludes only to the common people."

"Oh, I misunderstand, do I? Faith, I'm glad of that, any how?" replied the Duchess; "but I thought it was of *uncommon* people the Baron talked about; for by this and by that, they're not

common enough for me to have caught sight of 'em."

Baron Bothmar did not deign to make any answer, though he understood perfectly well what had been said. He only condescended to look a little more disdainful than ordinary. The rest of the Hanoverian party satisfied themselves by the usual telegraphic communication, as expressed by particular glances at each other.

The Duchess looked at the group for a moment, and then said in an under-tone to the Duke of Devonshire: "It's a saying that too much pudding 'll choke a dog—an English dog, an Irish dog, or any dog; but it's mighty mistaken I am if all the money in the country would choke a Hanoverian rat." She then left that part of the apartment, and sought the Princess, who was very kindly endeavouring to induce some of the ladies of her suite to assist in the concert.

Her Royal Highness had asked Fanny Meadows; but as Fanny Meadows could not sing, she was readily excused. Sophy Howe pleaded a sore throat, and Mary Bellenden assumed a good deal of alarm at the thought of singing to such an audience. Instead of pressing more urgently, as Lord Bellenden's daughter expected,

the Princess, in her most persuasive manner, turned to Mary Lepel, whom she already began to regard as a favourite, and entreated her to gratify the King and herself with an English song.

“ Oh, honey !” exclaimed the Duchess of Bolton, who came up at that moment, “ sing, by all manner of manes ; for, bad luck to me, if I haven’t just heard from that Baron Bother—”

“ Baron Bothmar ?” inquired the Princess.

“ Baron Bothmar, then, if that’s his name ;—that divil a note of music have we got in this country worth so much as a pinch of salt.”

Mary Lepel could not get off such a request as easily as her schoolfellows had done ; for she *could* sing, and could *not* plead a sore throat. The remembrance of her performance before the Duchess of Marlborough might have made her hesitate ; but the encouraging manner in which the Princess tried to induce her, and the honest-heartedness the Duchess threw into her solicitations, seemed to render an excuse impossible.

Mary Lepel intimated in a modest and gentle way to the Princess, that she was ready to fulfil the gracious wishes of her Royal Highness ; and then the Princess took her by the hand, and encouraging her with a profusion of thanks and

praises, led her to the King. His Majesty was still in that reverie which he had fallen into when his mind had dwelt upon the pleasant memories connected with earlier and far happier days.

“I have ventured to bring before your Majesty,” said the Princess, approaching her father-in-law, “the daughter of that zealous and able officer Brigadier-General Lepel, whom I have induced to afford your Majesty an opportunity of hearing the true character of an English ballad.”

The King slowly raised his eyes, and startled visibly when they met the same beautiful features that had so much affected him once before. Mary Lepel curtsied lowly before her sovereign. He quickly recovered his composure; his troubled aspect even bearing a look of kindness as he gazed on the touching expression of that very lovely countenance.

“Dormer,” said he at last to the young nobleman who was watching the scene with an interest he had rarely felt, “lead Madam Lepel to the harpsichord.”

The son of Lord Stanhope quickly proceeded to fulfil the royal commands; and it was scarcely possible at that moment, the King could have asked him to do anything more agreeable to him.

“Courage! adorable creature!” he whispered, as he gracefully handed her to the instrument; “fear nothing; you have many friends, and at least one, who is the humble slave of your beauty, stab my vitals!”

The Brigadier’s daughter felt her heart flutter rather strangely. To be asked by a Princess to sing before a King, and the most distinguished members of his Court, would she thought, be trying even to such heroines as Clelia and Cassandra; and, moreover, she could not but acknowledge to herself that had she been in their heroic position, she could not have been attended by a more desirable companion than was at her side,—Prince Oroondates only excepted—nor have been addressed in more appropriate language than that she had just heard.

The movement of the Princess with her youthful Maid of Honour, and her subsequent approach to the harpsichord with the handsome son of Lord Stanhope, attracted the attention of every one in the room. But the German group stared, as though they knew not what it meant; and then looked at each other, as if let it mean what it would, *they* meant a good deal of disapprobation and dissatisfaction.

Mary Lepel sat down to the instrument, and

paused a few seconds to satisfy herself which of the various performances that had gained her the approval of her not easily pleased schoolmistress, she should attempt before such an audience. She did not like trying over again the song in which she had so greatly failed when seeking by it the suffrages of her then dreaded visitor the Duchess of Marlborough. She thought of one, and she thought of another, and could not very readily satisfy herself as to which was most appropriate.

She did not like a merry song, it might be deemed out of place amongst such stately people; she could as little approve of anything remarkably sentimental, as it might not be to the taste of the King. At last she remembered a verse or two of rather pathetic words which had been set to music of an exceedingly plaintive character; and just as the Princess, noticing her hesitation, came up to encourage her, she commenced singing the following lines:—

THE LOVE LOST.

Where buds are blowing
And sun-beams glowing
And streams are flowing
The live long day,

The lark is soaring
O'er earth's green flooring
And wildly pouring
His thrilling lay.

'Tis there I ponder
In silent wonder
Still growing fonder
With secret joy ;
Of all that smiling
And fond beguiling,
The world's reviling
Shall ne'er destroy.

The sweet entreating
Of that bless'd meeting,
My heart's wild beating,
Could ne'er control ;
For kindling pleasure
Filled full of treasure
In ample measure
Both heart and soul.

But all was seeming
For Fate was scheming
To cloud this dreaming,
So here I stray
Where buds are blowing,
And sun-beams glowing
And streams are flowing
The live long day.

The singer could not complain of having an inattentive audience ; but their attention was natural enough, for rarely had audience so exquisite a singer. Her voice was of that clear and sweet quality of tone so rarely to be met with even amongst the most famous vocalists, that comes upon the ear like the music of a dream, too rich in melody to belong to anything actual and familiar ; and the taste with which it was modulated, the expression of tenderness, of regret, of passion, and sympathy which breathed from every note, appeared to hold the listeners as with a spell.

The little knot of Hanoverians might have been as unconcerned as they looked ; and in particular the Baron might have felt all the disdain his ungracious features expressed ; but there was not another person who did not betray evidence of having been very greatly affected. The King leaned over his bass viol during the progress of the song, his soul apparently absorbed by the sweet sounds he heard. He seemed entirely to forget the miseries of his position. The voice that had so greatly sweetened his first taste of happiness, came again to his heart as it had come before he had allowed himself to be the dupe of deceit and the slave of debauchery. And with

the well remembered tones, came the look so full of innocence and affection, which had given his soul a paradise it so little appreciated. The stubborn heart was touched by the eloquence of those memories which now so irresistibly appealed to it; and with eyes fixed on the lovely singer, and ears drinking in every note of her delicious voice, a tear was seen to trickle down his rugged cheek.

“Oh now, Baron Bother!” exclaimed the Duchess of Bolton, exultingly, “what do you say to that, I’d be glad to know? If you’ve got eleganter music in Germany than what we’ve just heard, ye must be all so many full grown cherubims, and deserve to live in glory. And its meself that wishes ye a safe journey there,” added she, lowering her voice, “every mother’s son of ye, and the sooner the better.”

“That girl will be in our way, Baron Bothmar; she must be got rid of,” whispered Mademoiselle Schulenburg as they left the apartment together. The Baron gazed on her intently, and her look was equally fixed and decided; the two seemed in this glance of concentrated malice thoroughly to understand each other.

CHAPTER IV.

MAIDS OF HONOUR AT TEA.

O wonderful creature ! a woman of reason !
Never grave out of pride, never gay out of season ;
When so easy to guess who this angel should be,
Would one think Mrs. Howard ne'er dreamt it was she.

LORD PETERBOROUGH.

A VERY merry company had assembled in Mrs. Howard's room in St. James's Palace, consisting of several ladies in attendance on the Princess, and several gentlemen in attendance on the Prince. Among the former were our lovely Maids of Honour. Among the latter were the elegant Philip Dormer, Colonel Argyle, the Duke of Argyle's brother, a remarkable fine specimen of a Scottish cavalier, tall, handsome, with fresh complexion and light hair; and Mr. Anthony

Lowther, brother of Viscount Lonsdale, a well made, gentlemanlike man with a rakish expression in his languishing dark eyes and prepossessing physiognomy.

They were taking their tea, over which meal Mrs. Howard presided, and by her own good humour set an example for the vivacity of her associates. Nor did they appear reluctant to follow such an example, for some particularly smart conversation appeared to be going forward, if any thing could be judged from the bursts of merriment that rapidly succeeded each other. Pompey was in waiting, and by his expressive countenance seemed as much to enjoy the mirth as any of the company.

They sat round the table very socially, a gentleman by a lady, who received from him all the polite attentions which she required; Mrs. Howard before the tea equipage replenishing the cups, or dishes as they were then invariably called, talking and laughing, and encouraging all to be as much at their ease as herself. And much at her ease every one seemed to be, with perhaps the single exception of Fanny Meadows, who had a gentleman on each side of her, whose extreme solicitude for her comfort and particularly polite

conduct towards her, did not seem to obtain that return they deserved.

Sophy Howe was somewhat too heedlessly attracting the notice of Mr. Lowther, who had the reputation of being a dangerous acquaintance for a pretty woman. He was a well known libertine; but this was a very common character at the time; he was also a finished dissembler, a practised seducer, in short a lady-killer of the most destructive description. The sort of countenance he possessed was one of those that produce the strongest impressions on the susceptible hearts of the gentle sex. It was soft yet manly; could express a vast deal of tenderness, though its general aspect appeared proud and haughty. He did not pay any marked degree of attention to the very charming young lady beside him; yet she failed in nothing that ought to have had the effect of engrossing his attention. He appeared more inclined to devote himself to his next neighbour on the other side of him, who was the attractive and graceful Mary Bellenden.

But Lord Bellenden's daughter was agreeably employed in playing off her Parisian manœuvres on Colonel Argyle, and the Colonel did not appear to consider them unworthy his observation. She

was talking to him of the glories of Paris; and there seemed little doubt he took her highly coloured pictures of what she had seen and heard in the French capital as something more than ordinarily interesting. The Colonel was a man of pleasant manners, without foppishness, and was gallant without being licentious. There was a manly soldier-like air about him, that spoke very strongly in his favour.

Mary Lepel was being entertained by Philip Dormer, who was evidently recommending himself in the most powerful manner to her good opinion. There was a well-bred ease in his behaviour that assisted wonderfully in keeping the young lady at ease with herself. He had been much struck by the exquisite loveliness of the Brigadier's daughter when he first beheld her at her father's house, on the memorable occasion we have chronicled at the commencement of this work, and entertained a most favourable opinion of her disposition; but when he came to be associated with her on more equal terms, and had daily opportunities of beholding her many amiable qualifications, he became interested in her, in a degree that seemed to denote that his feelings had been touched, while his admiration had been excited.

Philip Dormer had discovered his fair companion's favourite topic, and he endeavoured to establish a community of tastes. They talked of romances, and his Lordship became eloquent on the plots and characters in *Polexandre*, *l'illustre Bassa*, and *Prazimene*. This of course brought out the Brigadier's daughter, and she spoke with animation running into enthusiasm of '*le grand Cyrus*,' and *Cleopatra*, and *Prince Oroondates*. Her companion seemed to listen with marked interest to the somewhat exaggerated expressions of the youthful Maid of Honour. She described every hero, and gave her opinion of his qualifications and his conduct, with an amazing deal of sincerity. And she also entered into separate histories of her favourite heroines, making comparisons and observations which no doubt were as edifying as they were entertaining.

Then having run through her spirited recollections of *Artemise*, and *Britomart*, and *Delia*, and *Parthenissa*, and *Artamenes*, and *Almanzor*, and *Alcediana*, and *Doralezi*, and *Alcadate*, and *Panthée*, and *Telesile*, and *Amestris*, and I know not how many more worthies of both sexes, she had treasured up in her remembrance with a fidelity that completely surprised her companion,

she referred to particular incidents and striking passages, romantic, pastoral, and sentimental in their adventures, that ought to have given him the most agreeable opinion of her discrimination as well as of her power of memory.

Thus each of the fair schoolfellows were entertained, or entertained their companions ; but occasionally the conversation became general, and then these more confidential communications were suspended. Mrs. Howard it was who contrived to make all her company contribute, as it were, to a common fund of amusement. She was incessant in her efforts to elicit from those around her, remarks that could not fail to produce a chorus of genuine mirth. In short, these social meals under her auspices, were the delight of all the royal attendants.

The gentlemen of the bed-chamber, the grooms, the equerries and other officials of equal dignity who possessed the privilege of admittance to Mrs. Howard's apartments, were in raptures with the society they there enjoyed, and compared the sense of weariness they experienced in the performance of their duties when there were scarcely any females in the palace save the King's forbidding mistresses, to the felicity they had been

permitted to taste since the arrival of the Maids of Honour.

“St. James’s appears suddenly to have cast off its leaden dullness,” observed Mrs. Howard laughingly, as she continued her duties at the tea-table. “The poor old palace seems as fresh and as lively as a bird that’s just moulted.”

“I never quarrel with a pretty woman’s simile,” said Mr. Lowther; “and in this instance, I should not think of making the very slightest objection to it; but I must say, if old St. James’s has moulted, venerable bird as she is, she has now got a plumage such as she never could have boasted of before in her life.”

“Stab my vitals!” exclaimed Philip Dormer; “I wish she had got rid of her old feathers when she began to disclose her new ones.”

There was a general laugh at this allusion to the King’s mistresses and the Princess’s Maids of Honour, in which the ladies could not avoid joining.

“Yes, it would have been a wonderful advantage,” said Colonel Campbell, gallantly; “for with her present plumage, she is a bird of Paradise.”

"May I perish if that is not well said, Colonel," cried Philip Dormer.

"Yes, very happily expressed indeed," added Mr. Lowther.

"And she was little better than a screech owl before," continued Colonel Argyle.

"A metamorphoses, I should think, not to be found in Ovid," observed Sophy Howe.

"*Ma foi*, it's vastly pretty," said Mary Bellen-den, "and prodigiously flattering too; but the whole idea seems to give one the notion of the goose strutting in peacock's feathers."

"Well, my dears," cried Mrs. Howard, after the laugh that followed the last speech had concluded, "I must say you are not quite so thankful for the mighty pretty compliment that has been paid you, as you ought to be. Now had I been one of the feathers whose appearance has so greatly adorned the dear old bird, I should have been monstrous inclined to reward the discoverers of this extremely satisfactory moulting by some means or other that should be esteemed 'a feather in his cap' ever after."

The mirth again broke forth as heartily as before.

"But what say you, Madam Lepel," ob-

served Philip Dormer, as he handed a replenished cup to his fair companion. “ ’Pon my life, you appear to take as little heed of us as of our compliments ?”

“ Ah !” replied the Brigadier’s daughter, with a smile, readily joining in the humour of the moment, and the metamorphoses to which so many pleasant allusions had been made, “ I am afraid I class them in my mind with those remarkably light riders at Newmarket, who are distinguished by the name of ‘ feather-weights.’ ”

The jest was not superlatively bright ; but then the lady’s eyes were ; and its success of course was most brilliant. The gentlemen were enraptured. The ladies in ecstasies ; except Fanny Meadows, who thought it extremely improper for a young lady to be bandying jokes with gentlemen.

“ Mighty good, upon my word, child !” cried Mrs. Howard, her pleasant features a thousand times more pleasant than ever. “ But you dear diverting creature, I never thought you could have said so witty a thing. Apropos, did you hear what the Duchess of Bolton said last night at the concert, to the Princess ?”

“ What new blunder has my dear Irish friend been making ?” inquired Philip Dormer.

“ Oh, something in her usual way,” replied Mrs. Howard; “ it made the Princess laugh, and the Princess made us laugh, and when the Prince heard it he laughed more than all.”

“ But what was it, my dear Howard ?” inquired Mr. Lowther. “ You forget the Colonel and I belong to a sex proverbial for their intense curiosity.”

“ Oh you mad fellow !” exclaimed Sophy Howe, laughing heartily.

“ Dear tormenting devil !” cried Mrs. Howard, shaking her finger threateningly at him, “ I will punish you some of these days.”

“ Don’t tell him, *ma chère* !” said Mary Bellen-den in her sprightliest manner. “ It would be a pretty revenge not to say a word.”

“ Stab my vitals !” cried Philip Dormer. “ No pretty woman was ever able to hold her tongue ; so that sort of revenge is out of the question.”

“ I protest now you are horribly censorious !” said Mrs. Howard, good humouredly. “ I would be dumb from this instant ; but revenge is a passion I have no desire to cultivate. Now take another dish of tea, and I will tell my story. The Duchess was complaining of a favourite waiting maid whom she denounced to the Princess as the

laziest creature in the world; for she took twenty-four hours a day to do nothing in, and she never did it half."

Peals of light-hearted laughter followed this anecdote, together with several exclamations of "excellent," "admirable," "charming;" and others of a similar nature.

"May I perish if the Duchess is not a prodigious favourite of mine," observed Philip Dormer. "Her never-failing good-humour, her simplicity, and her perfect honesty of heart, are as irresistible as her blunders. She relates an anecdote in that delightful Doric of hers, that invariably makes it as picturesque as it is entertaining. I remember when the Duke of Devonshire was mentioning some great general who, wanting to get into Parliament, sent his portrait to decorate the Town-hall of a small place in Yorkshire where his name had never been heard of, the Duke appeared at a loss for a reason for such a proceeding. 'Oh, holy Paul,' exclaimed the Duchess, 'sure and isn't it as plain as a pike-staff, that the gin'ral's began to *canvas* the borough?'"

This anecdote caused the mirth of the company to break out afresh.

"She's an original, stab my vitals!" added Philip

Dormer. "But talking of originals, what's become of Handsome Hervey?"

"He is expected at the palace shortly?" said Mrs. Howard; "his turn of waiting having nearly arrived."

"And pray who is Handsome Hervey?" asked Mary Lepel.

"Lord child, havn't you heard of Handsome Hervey?" demanded Mary Bellenden. "*Est-il possible?*" and here the beauty exhibited one of the most effective of her French gesticulations.

"Surely you know my Lord Hervey?" said Mrs. Howard.

"Zounds! every body knows Hervey," exclaimed Philip Dormer.

"It would be prodigiously wonderful if every body didn't know Hervey," observed Anthony Lowther. "Hervey having taking such monstrous pains to make the whole world acquainted with him."

"But Madam Lepel is not likely to remain long without the honour of his acquaintance," added the Colonel.

"But who is my Lord Hervey, I should like to know?" inquired the Brigadier's daughter.

"Hervey is one of the Prince's gentlemen of

the bed-chamber," answered Mrs. Howard; "but however honourable that office, it happens to be the least of his dignities; for he is indisputably the grand Signor of Fashion—the King of the Dandies, the Czar of the Maccaronies, and the great Kham of taste, wit, and breeding."

The ladies laughed again very prettily.

"Stab my vitals!" cried Philip Dormer. "Hervey is too great a personage to be laughed at. His nod is as powerful as that of Jove."

"Dear now!" exclaimed Mary Lepel, incredulously.

"Indeed he is the most absolute of despots," added Anthony Lowther. "No one who possesses any pretensions to birth or breeding, can be permitted to make a figure in the world without his countenance and approbation."

"Oh, vastly pretty!" observed the Brigadier's daughter, with a shake of her little head. "I suppose, then, I had better present myself to this all-powerful gentleman, and ask him for his good offices."

"*Ma foi!* what a little simpleton you are," said Mary Bellenden, desirous of showing her greater knowledge of the great man. "My Lord Hervey is a nobleman, whose superior taste is so gener-

ally admitted, that the whole world of fashion is governed by it. It is so, child, *sans doute*."

"Yes ; Handsome Hervey reigns supreme amongst us," cried Mrs. Howard. "The Princess is as much under his influence as the humblest of her retinue."

"Dear now, this is all very strange !" exclaimed Mary Lepel, looking a little puzzled. "I wonder how he came to possess such authority."

"Why, the truth is, child, he is very handsome," replied Mrs. Howard, "and he is also the best-dressed man at Court ; and his manners are extremely graceful. He dances divinely, sings like an Anastasia, is a matchless poet, a brilliant wit, and in every way a most accomplished gentleman. I will not say that he is free from affectation, or deny that he gives himself the most extraordinary airs ; but the Princess thinks him the most perfect example in the kingdom of a finished gentleman, and, as in duty bound, we all follow her opinion."

"May I perish if Handsome Hervey is not looked up to as the king of us all," added Philip Dormer. "We are led by his judgment, and governed by his influence. I dare say you will think him a prodigious quiz, for he has the most

extravagant notions ever heard of in this world. But he can say a good thing when he likes; and his manner of saying it is pretty sure of being the best part of the jest. Some of us had got him to pay a visit to the museum of an enthusiastic naturalist, who, among other marvels, shewed us a toad that had been inclosed for centuries in a block of granite. Hervey looked on the object with intense commiseration in every feature, and said in his dry, quiet way, ‘I’m sure the poor wretch is monstrously to be pitied; his is, indeed, a *hard case*!’”

Hardly had the laugh subsided, when a servant announced Mr. Secretary Craggs; and then Mr. Secretary advanced into the apartment, where he knew himself to be welcome, in his usual jaunty and gay manner.

“Ladies, I kiss your fair hands: gentlemen, your most obedient. Mrs. Howard, I am charmed to see you!” cried he, as he made his way towards the tea-table, with his cocked-hat under his arm. “The enjoyment of such society pays a man for the endurance of a world of trouble and anxiety. Our dear Howard is a sort of female St. Peter, who has the keys of heaven in her charge; and when so unworthy a creature as I,

am allowed the blessed privilege of entrance, I cannot but feel it as immensely above my deserts."

"Lord! Mr. Secretary, your modesty is quite overpowering!" replied Mrs. Howard, presenting her new visitor with a cup of the grateful beverage she had been dispensing. "But I hope you've got some state secrets to tell us. I protest I'll lock my gates against you and your deserts, if you don't contribute to our amusement by letting us know something of importance which we couldn't know from any other source."

"Oh, you horrid wretch!" cried the Secretary in the same strain; "you divined my errand. Ladies," added he, bowing to the Maids of Honour, "I am come on an errand extremely secret and confidential."

"*Ma foi*, how delightful!" cried Mary Bellenden.

"Yes, lovely Bellenden; yes, matchless Lepel; yes, adorable Howe; yes, cold, yet charming Meadows, I bring you intelligence as new as it cannot but be interesting."

"Interesting! Oh, charming!"

"Dear, honest creature!"

"Worthiest, best of men!" exclaimed the

ladies, evidently in the highest state of pleasurable excitement.

“Stab my vitals, now, Craggs, I do believe you are only bamming these our fair companions,” said Philip Dormer; “you statesmen are so habituated to deluding each other, that you cannot help playing the same game amongst your friends.”

“Could I dare to deceive beings so celestial!” cried the Secretary of State, in a sort of horror at the idea. “I appeal to the gallant Colonel: I appeal to the other inestimable gentlemen.”

“Oh, I dare say you’d be deuced glad to do it!” exclaimed Anthony Lowther, mischievously.

“What sacrilege! what profanity!—I’m shocked; I’m horror-struck!” cried Secretary Craggs.

“Well, never mind,” said Mrs. Howard, in a consolatory tone, “I’m used to a great deal of what might shock other people; and I don’t think you are likely to be much the worst for what has ceased to affect me; so away with your horrors, and out with your secret.”

“*Ma foi*, I am dying to hear this secret,” added Mary Bellenden.

“And so am I,” said Sophy Howe.

“Oh, we’re all dying, Sir,” said Mary Lepel, in a manner the very reverse of so critical a state.

“I hope you are not entertaining yourself at our expense;—it would show monstrous want of feeling in you, after you have been made aware of the desperateness of our condition.”

“If the wretch doesn’t tell us his secret at once,” observed Mrs. Howard, “we’ll serve him worse than the Mohocks did the German tailor, whom, when they met, they so pricked with their swords to make him jump, that he could boast of more holes in his skin than a sieve; and all his skill was exerted in vain to darn himself to a state fit to be seen!”

“Ladies, I entreat, I conjure, I supplicate!” urged the Secretary, vehemently; “your enchanting looks pierce me through and through, as it is. ’Tis a refinement of cruelty to speak of sword-points.”

“Your secret or your life!” cried Mrs. Howard.

“I deliver it up at your summons, imploring you not to cast me quite impoverished on the world,” replied Mr. Secretary Craggs, with all the pathos of an old Hunks being rifled by a highwayman on Hounslow Heath. “To my account give ear. This is the sum total. The King has just consented to give a grand State Ball at St. James’s.”

"A grand State Ball!" exclaimed half-a-dozen voices, in as many different stages of astonishment.

"A grand State Ball at St. James's! Stab my vitals, that is pleasant intelligence for us, and all idle gentlemen hereabouts," said Philip Dormer.

"A grand State Ball at St. James's! 'Tis the charmingest news to us poor women we have heard this many a day," said Mrs. Howard, equally animated.

"Oh, won't I dance! and won't I have plenty of partners!" cried Sophy Howe, exultingly. "I declare now I could jump out of my skin in joy at the prospect."

"It's mightily to be hoped some one would be at hand to jump into it," observed the gallant Secretary. "Such a skin must not be lost for want of an occupant."

At this moment when all were extremely busy congratulating themselves and each other, on the gay prospect before them making engagements for certain dances, and consulting confidentially what should be done on such an occasion, the door opened, and the Prince of Wales was announced. Every one rose, but the Prince with great good humour insisted on their re-occupying their seats.

He was a frequent visitor to that apartment, sometimes, as many persons seemed to be well aware for the pleasure of obtaining those private interviews with the "good Howard" which had already affected that lady's reputation; but more lately for the gratification of equally confidential communications with one or other of the admirable Maids of Honour.

The poor Prince was a little embarrassed with the prospect of so much beauty. He considered that one of the first duties of the female attendants of his consort was to listen favourably to all the little tender speeches with which he might think proper to address them, and he took all possible pains to make this part of their occupation sufficiently familiar to them. But the young ladies being so extremely beautiful, and they being almost always together, made his proceedings rather awkward and undecided.

He would have given a good deal had there been but one Maid of Honour, or were it possible he could make himself agreeable to but one at a time; but the charming creatures were scarcely ever apart, and he knew not how to disburthen his mind of his devotion, for he entertained an impression that it was not exactly proper to make

love to one in the presence of the rest. Still he could not resist being as affectionate as he could to them all, and generally paid a visit once a day to Mrs. Howard to improve his acquaintance as much as was possible under the circumstances. "Ah my tear Howard !" he exclaimed, going up to that lady in his usual cordial manner ; " how is all vid you ? But you look so sharming, I need never ask noting about you," and he chucked her under the chin, and, as he believed unseen by any of the company, winked at her in a style somewhat more amatory than courtly.

Then moving towards the quiet and sedate Fanny Meadows, he proceeded to address her in much the same strain. " Oh mine littel vestal you is here, eh ? What for you look so demure ? Ah you zly rogue, if I vas to make lofe to you, I should soon cause you for to look anoder vay."

" Just so !" answered Sophy Howe, laughing heartily—a freedom she never failed to take with his Royal Highness ; " a very natural consequence of such love-making, I should think."

" Ah mine tearest Sopny, you is sure to have someting vunny to say ; and you laugh always, as if it vas for von vager. Ah mine pretty lofe, if

you vas mine, I vould make you laugh on de oder side of your bretty mout."

"You would get nothing by that; for whether on one side or the other, I should be sure to be laughing at your Royal Highness," retorted she very saucily.

"Prag is der goot dog, but hold vast is der petter dog," he replied slily pinching her arm as he passed by her. "But here is Madam Pellenden. Ah, Madam Pellenden, I am gladder to see you than any ting inder vorld. Oh you tear littel rogue, how pootiful is your eyes!" he added in a whisper.

"*Ma foi*, your Royal Highness does me much honour," replied Lord Bellenden's daughter.

"Not at all, not at all, my tear littel angel," he answered with more truth than he was aware of. "I never see noting vat is rely agribble till I meet your bretty face," he added in a low voice as he squeezed her hand, and looked most admiringly at her very handsome features.

"You are extremely polite, Sir," said Mary Bellenden quietly, and then added, courteously, "had not your Royal Highness better be seated?"

"No, I shall stand, and grow petter," replied the Prince.

"I'm very glad to hear it," she answered in a tone which very nearly set all her fair companions into a titter.

"So you tink I vant to grow petter!" he exclaimed; then turning to Mary Lepel, added, "vat you say Madam Lepel; do I vant to grow petter, do you tink? Eh, you sharming littel rogue."

"What your Royal Highness wants is not so clear as what your Royal Highness requires," said Sophy Howe laughingly.

"Go along vid you; I vill bunish you ven I am king. It shall be high treason vor you to look at a man. Would not dat be goot bunishment, Madam Lepel?"

"It depends on circumstances, your Royal Highness," said the Brigadier's daughter with great simplicity; scarcely knowing what reply to make.

"Circomsdances? Vat circomsdances my tear littel lofe?"

"As to whether the man be good or ill looking to be sure!" replied Sophy Howe with a laugh.

"My tear Sophy, you are von incorrigible rogue. I vill have you put into der billory, and into der whipping boast, and into der stocks, and you shall have pread and vater, and noting else, and

you shall not be bermitted to see any mans at all, and you shall vret yourself to viddlesdrings.”

Then noticing Mr. Secretary Craggs, he inquired if that gentleman had mistaken his road to the Privy Council; and Mr. Secretary made a very gallant speech, acknowledging that such a mistake was likely enough, which brought forth a good deal of good-natured banter from his Royal Highness. When he had sufficiently amused himself at the expense of the young statesman, he turned his weapons upon the other gentlemen, and he rallied each of them upon their partiality to Mrs. Howard's room. Every now and then he contrived to find an opportunity to whisper some piece of flattery into the ears of one of the Maids of Honour, or trod upon their toes, or nudged their elbows, or made use of some other equally refined way of attracting their attention.

He was told of the State Ball, the news of which he received with as much delight, as it had excited previously to his Royal Highness's entrance; and he gossiped for some time about dances and dancing, and the gratification of having what he called “agribble bartners.” Then his mind reverted to the Schulenburg and the Kielmansegge, and he hoped *they* might find fitting

partners; but had great doubts that in England they would be able to discover the only two proper persons that deserved to pair off with such “antederluvian grockodiles”:—one of whom was “der Teuvel,” and the other was “der Bope.”

In this way the time passed on very pleasantly till the Maids of Honour were summoned to attend on the Princess; the Prince then made his bow, taking with him his gentlemen; but not forgetting, before his departure, to whisper to each of the young beauties, the warmest protestations, and the most intense admiration.

CHAPTER V.

A STATE BALL.

Let Sporus tremble ! What ! that thing of silk !
Sporus, that mere white curd of asses milk !
Satire or sense, alas ! can Sporus feel ?
Who breaks a butterfly upon a wheel !

POPE.

THE wise policy which had led the unpopular King to assume a particular graciousness towards such of his subjects as appeared at the levée, induced him to proceed another step in the same path by giving a State Ball, in which were to be united as many members of the nobility and gentry, as the grand suite of apartments would hold. To these measures he acceded without asking the advice of his Hanoverian counsellors of either sex ;—who would certainly have dis-

suaded him from them if he had ; for they looked with jealousy upon any thing resembling friendly association of the sovereign with the English. It had been the work partly of his ministers, and partly of the Princess.

The King felt too that he wanted amusement. His own thoughts were a perpetual nightmare ;—an unceasing terror and anxiety pursued him from his cabinet to the council, and from the council to the apartments of his mistresses. He felt there were more amusing resources even than cutting paper figures, or playing at quadrille with an ugly woman ; and since he had seen the new faces—and very attractive ones he could not help considering them, extremely to the alarm of the Hanoverian phalanx, who guarded him so closely—his daughter-in-law had introduced into the palace, he felt a desire that every day seemed to grow stronger, to see more of them. Perhaps he took alarm at the efforts his heir was making to ingratiate himself with the people, and resolved to shew himself as much at home in his new kingdom, as he had been in his old electorate.

The announcement of so unexpected an entertainment produced a prodigious effect throughout the palace. From the Lord Chamberlain, to the de-

puty assistant scullion in the royal kitchen, all were in a wonderful state of bustle, labour, and activity. There were extensive preparations to be made in every department : a great deal had to be done, and of course a great deal had to be said. Some of the authorities found it necessary to add to their avocations, by refreshing their memories with the last measures, and the most fashionable steps. Lords of the bedchamber were found in quiet corners rehearsing favourite country dances. In the ante-chambers, gold-sticks were gavotting with clerk-marshalls, and equerries minuetting with exons in waiting.

But throughout St. James's there were no persons on whom the news produced a more decided effect, than on our young Maids of Honour. The prospect of a ball to the female imagination, is at all times a most agreeable one ; but a State Ball !—an entertainment presided over by the sovereign, in which all that is most splendid and captivating is sure to exist, and the most brilliant company may be found, is as far above all ordinary balls the most experienced of the sex may have enjoyed, as the fair light of the stars exceeds the dull glimmering of the watchman's lanthorn.

The fair school-fellows were in a state of consi-

derable excitement. The impression they had already produced, they had every reason to believe was greatly in their favour; but a much greater trial than they had yet endured, lay before them; and their success would depend on the manner they acquitted themselves on that occasion. The approaching entertainment would contrast them with all the loveliest of the land, many of whom might be much better qualified than themselves to gain the verdict of the assembly as the brightest ornaments of the Court; and they too were conscious of labouring under the disadvantage of having, through the hundred tongues of rumour, excited public expectation respecting them, to a height it was scarcely possible for them to realize.

For a wonder, Fanny Meadows was so taken up with what she should do, and what she should wear, that she forgot to express her usual scruples. Sophy Howe was as absolutely unscrupulous. She determined to enjoy herself without restraint; to say what she liked, and do as she pleased, and attract as many admirers as she could.

Mary Bellenden was never so well satisfied as on the eve of this delightful entertainment. A Court Ball was the very scene in which she was

born to shine. The advantages she possessed over her young contemporaries in her "finishing" in France, was now to have such a field for its display, as must at once establish her pre-eminence on a basis that could never be disturbed.

Mary Lepel was a little bewildered. She saw that she was to make one in a splendid exhibition, and with a great degree of resolution made up her mind to play her part as effectively as could ever have been done by the best-conducted heroine of her acquaintance.

To appear worthy of their position as Maids of Honour, the Princess had given directions to her own tire-woman to prepare everything requisite for them in the best taste, and of the handsomest materials. Never could there be so admirable an opportunity for her to produce on the mind of the higher classes of the country, by means of her beautiful attendants, a favourable impression for her Consort; and she took great pains to make the most of it. She gave them much kind advice; endeavoured to moderate the spirits of the overbold, and raise the confidence of the timid; and instructed them in the etiquette that governed every thing in these gay meetings.

The important night arrived; and such a mob

of sedans, chariots, footmen, link-boys, soldiers, and constables, St. James's Street and Pall Mall had rarely seen in their palmiest days. And such a din of shouting, swearing, crashing and abusing, those respectable thoroughfares had as rarely heard. Outside the palace it was not only a Babel at the confusion of tongues, but a Babel in a state of riot and uproar of which the inspired text gives no adequate idea. The link-boys out-bawling the constables, and the coachmen out-bawling both.

Inside, the most enlivening music cheered while it tranquillized the company as they escaped from the deafening uproar through which they had been obliged to pass. The whole of the magnificent state apartments were thrown open; the largest fitted up as ball rooms with an excellent orchestra, and the smaller ones adjoining were card-rooms for the accommodation of the King and such as were inclined for play. There were also refreshment rooms where every thing that could tempt the sated, or refresh the weary, could be procured in abundance.

The palace officials of every grade and character were to be seen everywhere most gorgeously attired, ready to assist every body, or to get in

every body's way according to circumstances ; and the company came streaming up the grand staircase like a meteor—a mass of velvet, satins, embroidery, diamonds and jewels of incalculable value. And then they spread through the grand apartments glittering with chandeliers and blazing with wax-lights, making the place look a fairy garden in the glare of a perpetual sunshine.

A great number had been invited ; but these invitations were well distributed, and nearly all the distinguished families whose loyalty could be depended on, or whose love of gaiety could be excited, had been included. Some came to see, many came to be seen, and not a few mounted the royal staircase with both objects in view. The majority consisted of those who were, or those who chose to consider themselves young, for whom balls are as necessary an amusement as coral and bells to the infant. But there were a considerable minority whose youth had bade them a long farewell, and who could amuse themselves only by looking on with vain longings or vainer regrets ; or by seeking the excitement of the card tables, and losing or winning a few hundreds in each other's society.

On this occasion the art of dress and the gra-

tification of personal vanity were carried to the most extravagant excess. Respectable old dowagers, such as the Duchess of Buckingham, were not satisfied unless they carried about them the wealth of a province; and the most juvenile of the party had taken equal care to array herself in all the costly finery her family could procure for her. The variety of head-dresses exceeds belief. Some of the faded belles of Queen Mary's reign still adhered to the towering structure that had then been so much the rage; younger beauties adopted a more becoming *coiffure*, and refrained from powder, though they evidently were partial to patches. Hoops, too, were of various sizes. Some of the elder and more ambitious appearing as if they required a whole apartment for themselves, whilst the younger allowed their drapery to swell out from their hips sufficiently to make more enticing their slender waists and graceful shoulders.

The gentlemen were not less ostentatious in their display of velvets, embroidery, and fine cloths, with matchless cambric and immaculate stockings; and their wigs varied almost as much in their dimensions as the petticoats of their ladies, and many were much more expensive.

There were several elderly beaus present who rivalled their juniors in the extreme richness of their apparel. Some who boasted a prince's income displayed their resources partly as a means of recommending themselves to their fair friends, and partly from a love of ostentation ; for vanity and pride were the predominant characteristics of many of the elder grandees of the Court of George I., and in few did these failings flourish with more luxuriance than in the arrogant Charles Seymour, Duke of Somerset, who was one of the company, and the gay and profligate John Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham, with whom he was conversing.

Some were talking politics, some scandal ; the immense rise of South Sea Stock occasioned numberless communications. Many conversed only in vile detraction, many in idle gossip, and not a few chose matters still more objectionable. But the general topic of the curious of one sex and the gallant of the other was the beauty of the new Maids of Honour. On this subject the young ladies were a little incredulous, the elder ones rather contemptuous ; but the gentlemen, young and old, rivalled each other in their enthusiastic expressions.

A group had congregated near the orchestra. Prominent among them was a handsome man of medium height, superbly dressed, whose wild daring glance dwelt licentiously on every fair form that came within his observation.

"I tell you they are all Venuses," said he with an oath with which the reader can dispense. "Dormer swears that the more he becomes acquainted with them the more ravishingly beautiful he thinks them. And Buckingham says, the old sinner ! that even in Charles's days, when the market was so well stocked, he never met with anything so much to his taste."

"I hope they will prove Venuses, Wharton," said a gentleman plainly dressed, thin and tall in person, and much the senior of the last speaker, whose look, however, was scarcely less rakish than that of his companion. He was well known there and every where else as the bold and eccentric Earl of Peterborough. "I hope they will prove Venuses if we can only persuade the dear creatures we are the Adonises fate has provided for them."

"No, no," exclaimed the Earl of Berkeley laughingly, "no Adonis for me. I rather think, if my schoolboy recollections are not confound-

edly at fault, that that respectable personage found making love to Madam Venus rather too much for him."

"Oh yes, but that's often the case when the women get so deucedly fond," replied the young profligate. "I, like Adonis, have found in love-making a *horrible bore*."

"Mars, perhaps, would be a more agreeable character to represent," said Lord Peterborough, having enjoyed sufficiently the Duke of Wharton's joke. "That old soldier besieged the goddess with all the success either of us could desire as his representative."

"Very true, Peterborough," answered his Grace. "But you see he soon discovered others had as much right to the citadel as he. Now I don't deny but that I could very readily give up possession after I had had sufficient acquaintance with my conquest—for I am devilish accommodating, and can't exist without variety—but with such sieges as we are alluding to, I want no comrades."

"Oh, your humble servant!" exclaimed Anthony Lowther. "That is as much as to say that these four marvellous beauties, for each of whom a hundred young fellows are madly in love, must fall to you, and to you only. Zounds!

what a monopolizing conscience the fellow has ! Wonder he doesn't lay claim to all the sex at once !”

There was a general laugh, in which the young Duke joined. “Don't be alarmed,” he replied, “you shall have your chance as well as the rest.”

“Oh you're vastly civil ; devilish generous, 'pon my soul !” cried the other.

“But what does Hervey say about them !” inquired Lord Berkeley. “Hervey is quite a Lord Chancellor in such judgments.”

“I don't think Hervey has seen either of them. He has been away from the Court some time,” said another.

“I was told he returned to-day,” observed Lord Peterborough.

“Curse me if there's not the finest show of women here to-night I've ever beheld in one place,” remarked the Duke, scanning the features of the lovely women who approached him, with a glance that made many of them turn theirs in a different direction. “It makes one think the Sultan had turned out his seraglio, and that they were all marching about here to find other masters.”

“By Jove then they don’t seem in a hurry to make up their minds,” said Lord Berkeley ; “ but here comes the Duchess of Cleveland ; I’ll wager a hundred this venerable Light of the Harem comes to let fall her handkerchief at Wharton’s feet.”

This idea, which was received with a loud laugh from his companions, made the Duke, with a very unflattering observation respecting that profligate old woman, remove himself to another part of the room, where he joined the Dukes of Somerset and Buckingham. They were also talking of the Maids of Honour.

These old libertines who ought to have been preparing for their graves, were comparing with the *gusto* of connoisseurs the claims for pre-eminence of the beautiful attendants of the Princess, and again comparing their attractions with those of the different toasts they had known in the hot days of their young manhood. They spoke learnedly of eyes, black, blue, hazel, and all the most admired shades ; and had a great deal to say respecting complexions. Shapes were then canvassed, the stout and the thin, the tall and the short, were brought in review, and fairly considered : and as each brought forward his vast experience

of womankind, there was as much knowledge thrown on the subject as ought to have made the pursuit of a pretty woman as simple as the first rule of arithmetic.

“Zounds, here is Wharton!” exclaimed the elder of these Nestors of gallantry; “When are we to behold these dear creatures? Positively I am burning with impatience to feast my eyes on their exquisite beauties.”

“I have come here for no other purpose; and as I hope for their smiles,” said the other, “I am dying to see them.”

“Hallo there!” cried the Duke of Wharton in tones of astonishment, “confound you if your young blood is’nt getting up alarmingly. I would’nt trust one of them with you, strike me dumb! No, not one; it could lead to nothing but the old story.”

“To what old story does your Grace allude?” inquired the Duke of Buckingham.

“Oh! one mighty edifying,” replied the young Duke, glancing from one to the other of his ancient rivals, “with a moral that ought to do you a world of good.”

“Bless my heart, and what story is it?” asked the Duke of Somerset, with a chuckle.

“Susanna and the Elders !” answered the Duke of Wharton, and he left their Graces to digest the joke at their leisure.

At that moment there was a stir at the entrance of the state apartments : the musicians commenced a grand march with extraordinary energy, and a lane having been formed through the throng of his bowing and curtseying subjects, the well known snuff-coloured suit of the King with no other decoration than the ribbon and star was seen advancing along, the wearer bending as he received the acknowledgements of those with whom he was acquainted, and passing a few words to the few who could converse with him. It was an awkward attempt at royal courtesy : a bear in the same suit might have done it quite as well ; but his guests had not been sanguine in their expectations, so that his undignified demeanour created no disappointment.

George I. was followed by the Prince and Princess of Wales ; the former had paid a little more attention to dress than was usual with him : yet it was still far from being appropriate to his station ; but if he neglected his own person, he assuredly was not guilty of any neglect of the persons of his father’s fairest subjects, for he was

extremely gracious to the gentlemen who recognised him when a very pretty woman happened to be his near neighbour, speaking kindly to the one, while he looked still more kindly on the other. The Princess was superbly dressed—her tall figure and stately carriage, her countenance so mild yet so majestic, and her beautifully shaped hands and arms, were not lost upon the admiring crowd. She appeared to immense advantage by the side of the mean figure and inexpressive face of her husband.

The royal family passed; but those who immediately followed attracted the most attention. They were the Maids of Honour. The crowd pushed forward eagerly to get a glimpse of them; by the way some of the company had in the morning crowded and pushed with equal anxiety to purchase South Sea Stock, which was now at double its previous value. Those who were in the front rank enjoyed a comfortable stare, but many were obliged to be satisfied with a glimpse. Amongst the former were the two noble Dukes described in a former page; they honoured each of the young ladies with a rapid yet searching scrutiny, in which every grace was noted as correctly as if it had been put down in an auctioneer's catalogue.

"I *must* have her," muttered the Duke of Somerset; the Duke of Buckingham's thoughts took the same interpretation.

"I *will* have her!" exclaimed the Duke of Wharton to himself, as he got out of the crowd.

In the meantime the youthful beauties proceeded in the suite of their royal mistress, followed by a distinguished train of gentlemen in attendance on the royal family; from the pompous Duke of Newcastle, the Lord Chamberlain, down to the scornful Baron Bothmar, who fancied himself the real King of England. With the Hanoverians was of course the ugly Schulenburg, with her two ugly daughters, and her monstrous friend Madame Kielmansegge, who, among those who had beheld the admirable Maids of Honour, excited remarks far less favourable than would have gratified them had such reached their ears.

The King's favourite seemed not quite ignorant of the prevailing impression against her; for as she noticed the admiration excited by her young rivals, her countenance assumed that additional sourness which aqua fortis would give when poured into a vessel of vinegar.

The fair schoolfellows were variously affected by the observation and admiration they created.

Fanny Meadows assumed to be quite shocked at so many men staring at her ; whilst Sophy Howe on the contrary looked as if she particularly liked it. Mary Bellenden did not look so ; she wore the air of a beauty to whom admiration was a matter of course ; but Mary Lepel was disconcerted. She did not affect being shocked, like Fanny Meadows ; but she found herself obliged to cast her eyes to the ground, to escape seeing the impassioned looks directed towards her.

The royal family having passed through the state apartments, and sufficiently entertained themselves for the time with noticing the guests, the King retired to the card-room to play with his Hanoverian friends, or with the Duke of Newcastle, and a select few of his English subjects who were willing to pay their court to his favourite mistress, and lose their money.

The orchestra now struck up a lively air, and the dancers began to arrange themselves for commencing the evening's entertainment. The Prince had wandered from the side of his Consort, and was industriously engaged in talking nonsense in bad English to every pretty woman who would listen to him. He did not attempt to dance : it would have increased the amusement of the company if he had.

The Princess did not choose to dance, as there was no one of her own rank to whom she could give her hand ; so she sat down in a sumptuous seat at the top of the principal apartment, where she could at one and the same time see the dancing, in which she greatly delighted, and enjoy a metaphysical argument on the nature of Free Will, with some learned scholars who were amongst the company, to whom dancing was impossible, whose society she fancied was almost equally entertaining. This enjoyment might be thought to be rather out of place ; but her Royal Highness had strange tastes, and was just as likely in a ball-room to commence an argument on some disputed point in religion, as on an obscure question in metaphysics.

We must leave the Princess to her learned associates, consisting of Herr Muddlewitz, a German philosopher, from Halle ; Monsieur Skyscraper, a French astronomer, from Geneva ; and Dr. Stifftext, an English divinity doctor of Oxford ; who stood bowing round her chair, each entertaining a high sense of the honour done him by her Royal Highness's notice ; and each wondering with all the powers of his mind, what could induce her to notice his companions. We must take ourselves to the dancers, for the Princess had

given directions that the ball should commence, and the Master of the Ceremonies had done his duty, the ladies being accommodated with partners, and standing in their proper places ready to set their pretty feet in motion at the first summons.

The fair schoolfellows stood up with the rest, each with her partner. Fanny Meadows with Sir Lucas Colpepper, Sophy Howe with Anthony Lowther, Mary Bellenden with Colonel Argyle, and Mary Lepel with Philip Dormer—an arrangement that had been in existence long before they entered the ball-room. “Money Musk” was most spiritedly played by the capital band in attendance, and as spiritedly was it danced. The music of the ball-room in the early part of the last century went directly to the feet of the company, and often with such power, that it seemed able to make the cripple leap, and the halt to bound as if their heels were of Indian rubber. At least such might be said of the music of our national, or, as it was commonly called, country-dance. And many of the tunes were of considerable antiquity. They had served for the saltatory frolics of time-honoured Queen Bess; they had given spirit to the far wilder revels of our Merry

Monarch ; and they were dear to the heart of the stately dames of good Queen Anne.

Rarely are these tunes now heard ; and from St. James's their memory seems wholly to have departed. Gone is the recollection of "the Cushion dance;" and "Trenchmore" is as obsolete as the hoop. In place of their honest, homely phrases, we have an endless variety of foreign fooleries each more absurd than the other, and save very old-fashioned people in remote places, who are wise enough to cling to the innocent amusements of their ancestors, the pleasant sounds that so delighted the beauties of a by-gone age have passed away, leaving for the characteristic and picturesque dances that were wholly our own, an endless variety of nondescripts contributed by a dozen different nations.

"Money Musk" was in great favour at this period, and with gay hearts and nimble feet the wearers of velvet coats and satin petticoats responded to the call it made upon them. It was a beautiful sight to see the long lines of ladies and cavaliers in the stately and picturesque costume of the period, going through the evolutions of this animated dance. It was like a moving parterre, where roses set to tulips, and hyacinths

went down the middle and up again, hand-in-hand with anemonies. Indeed, nothing could be more imposing in its way, or more agreeably join recreation with dignity than the stately figure of the gentleman with his sword by his side, in all the consequence of wig, ruffles, and embroidery, gliding by the lady as she floated buoyantly along in her swelling hoop and elaborate head-dress, every one like a graceful heroine leading her knight, a willing prisoner, at her side.

The fellow pupils of the incomparable Penelope Stiffandstern had been well grounded in all the polite arts, so that they were qualified to make as good a figure at a royal ball as any one there; and their partners had no fault to find with their performances, notwithstanding they were considered extremely good judges of a young lady's qualifications. Occasionally there was an opportunity to make an observation, of which they generally availed themselves, as they were expected to do. Fanny Meadows went on very satisfactorily with her partner till he ventured to be complimentary, which disquieted her extremely. She changed the conversation to the dance, to the company, to the music, to the heat; and, in short, manœuvred like a very Marlborough to prevent her compa-

nion becoming, as she pretended to fear he would, too warm in his admiration.

Sophy Howe was evincing a partiality for her unprincipled companion it was evident she did not care to disguise from him. He had commenced a pursuit which he was too familiar with to stumble in. He saw the game in view, and as he had done many a time before, spread his nets for its destruction ; yet apparently was as careless about his handsome partner as the most indifferent person in the room. This appearance of coldness, with a creature so thoughtless and impassioned, did all the mischief it was intended to do, and the reckless Sophy increased her efforts to captivate one who had already thrown his serpent coils around her heart.

Mary Bellenden was much less susceptible to tender impressions. Not that she failed to appreciate the manly graces of Colonel Argyle ; but she was too familiar with the artificial atmosphere of vanity and folly to care more for his attentions, than she would have done for those of any other handsome man in the room. Nor was Mary Lepel likely to throw her affections away inconsiderately. She might have acknowledged to a slight partiality for the hero of her

first adventure; but her nature was too good to be misled by such prepossessions. She had a marvellous idea of becoming a heroine; but then it must be one possessing all the perfections of all the most perfect ones of her acquaintance; and nothing less than a Prince Oroondates would content her.

Both Colonel Argyle and Philip Dormer addressed their partners in the style invented for and expected by particularly good looking young ladies at a ball having particularly good looking partners; but there was a decided difference in the manner of the two gentlemen. The Colonel expressed himself like a soldier and a gentleman; in terms of admiration certainly, but there was a heartiness about it that bespoke its sincerity, and it was not allowed to express too much. The other was a courtier, with a courtier's manners, and a courtier's morals. His flatteries meant nothing; graceful and accomplished as he was, he was too calculating and too selfish to be sincerely in love, even with so divine a creature as his partner.

The gentlemen did not vary more in their addresses, than did the two ladies in the manner in which they received them. The daughter of Lord Bellenden sat down her companion's admi-

ration, as but another item to that gratifying account she had previously opened at Paris with princes, counts, generals, judges, ecclesiastics, &c. &c. She liked him so far, that all her Parisian fascinations were bestowed upon him, and her satisfaction was by no means small at having so splendid a theatre to display them in, and so grand an audience.

Mary Lepel took the flatteries of her companion as civilities natural to the time and the place. She was pleased to be the object of such graceful attentions, and she was enraptured with the scene in which she moved. Her partner fancied that the pleasure that made her brilliant eyes even much more lustrous than they usually were, originated in his refined compliments and eloquent admiration ; and congratulated himself on his progress.

With such relations to each other, between the fair schoolfellows and their adorers, the dance concluded. In the next the ladies changed their partners, and the gallant Colonel took Mary Lepel, whilst the elegant Philip Dormer received the hand of Mary Bellenden. Scarcely had this arrangement been effected, when the Duke of Wharton advanced towards the Brigadier's daughter, accompanied by Anthony Lowther, who with

more freedom than good breeding introduced him to the reigning beauty. He lost no time in addressing himself to her, in a style he had reason to believe was irresistible, and seemed greatly disappointed when he found he was too late to engage her for the next dance. Consolation was offered his Grace in the hand of Fanny Meadows, whom he contrived before he parted with her to horrify nearly out of her wits by the extreme freedom of his manners, and the licentiousness of his sentiments.

In the meantime the select party at the top of the principal apartment were getting on rarely with their philosophical discussions. The German philosopher was as mystical, the French astronomer as transcendental, and the English Divine as spiritual as it was possible for them to be even in the presence of a Princess. They were extremely courteous, each shewing how he liked praise by the liberality with which he dispensed it to the other, which the latter felt bound to return with compound interest; nevertheless, either would have been inexpressibly glad had his associates been at the bottom of the Red Sea with mill stones securely fastened round their necks; for he was convinced he could have a much

better chance of the favour of the Princess, were they removed. Her Royal Highness encouraged them to proceed in their arguments, taking care they should not drop for lack of fuel ; and when one subject was likely to be exhausted, starting a fresh one, equally open to disputation. In this way they disposed of Free Will, Necessity, Chance, Matter and Mind, and a few other dark matters, that require a good deal of light to see into ; when the Princess began to get a little tired of her company, and turned her attention more intensely towards the dancers, amongst whom she watched the lovely figures of her attendants with peculiar interest.

She was however getting listless and fatigued. The Prince was amusing himself with some attractive guests in another apartment. The King was surrounded by cringing courtiers and greedy sycophants in the card-room. Neither thought of her. A shade of melancholy was passing over her handsome features ; suddenly it dispersed, and a smile of the most winning sweetness took its place, as her eyes fell upon the figure of a gentleman advancing towards her.

The gentleman was remarkable for his appearance ; apparently a very young man, possessed

of an extremely fair complexion and peculiarly feminine features ; his figure was also slight, and altogether he might have been mistaken for a very pretty girl in male attire. His dress there could be no doubt had been chosen with more than ordinary discrimination. There was evidence in the fashion, in the colour, and in the material of each portion of the costume, that shewed the wearer exercised a taste in such matters, of an extraordinary refined and ingenious character. His wig was the triumph of the perruquier's art, and must have cost some fifty guineas, if it cost a shilling ; his coat was a model, it sat upon him as if he had been born in it ; his waistcoat was a flower garden, a more delicate piece of work never passed from the tailor's hands ; his ruffles and linen were of a texture that would have charmed the heart of every spinster enamoured of such curiously fine fabrics ; his pearl-coloured stockings, his satin breeches, his diamond buckles, dress sword, and well cut shoes were truly marvellous pieces of work. There was not so fine a gentleman in his Majesty's dominions.

The expression of his countenance was calm and dignified—a sense of greatness seeming to steal over its somewhat too decided expression of

effeminacy ; a sort of secret conviction of his own absolute power gave boldness to the glance, whilst an air of habitual courtesy rendered the features gentle and pleasing. He advanced gracefully towards the Princess, with a smile on his countenance and altogether a manner such as that with which one sovereign would approach another with whom he was in amity.

“Ah, my Lord Hervey !” exclaimed the Princess, half rising from her seat, and with a countenance slightly flushed with pleasure ; “how glad I am to see you !”

Lord Hervey took the proffered hand in one of his own, which in whiteness and in the gems with which it was adorned rivalled the lady’s. He bent one knee, raised the hand to his lips, with an elegance worthy of so high-bred a gentleman, and drawled out a few words, a very few words, in which honour and happiness, humble servant, and Royal Highness were alone distinguishable.

Lord John Hervey, or Handsome Hervey as he was usually styled, was the mirror of good breeding, and the model of dress ; and this was so universally acknowledged that all young men of fashion looked up to him, as the head of their

college. In all matters respecting the dress and conduct of a gentleman his word was law and his decision indisputable ; but whilst thus reigning unchallenged the head and chief of the world of dandies, he was desirous his claims should consist of something besides attention to dress and deportment ; and he signalised himself by sayings and doings the most extravagantly macaroni-ish and effeminate that had ever been heard of in England. He was an accomplished gentleman, a fine scholar, an excellent poet, and a brilliant wit ; but he seemed determined to make his talents subservient to the most extraordinary affectations that ever distinguished an empty-headed fop. He was a man of high family, with aristocratic prejudices ; but took much pains to make the world believe that he prided himself infinitely less on being son and heir to the Earl of Bristol, than on being the best dressed man at Court ; for at Court he had determined to shine, and had there just commenced his career, with the appointment of Gentleman of the Bedchamber to the Prince of Wales.

His words were very few, and affectedly epigrammatic, or marked by some startling inconsistency, absurdity, or foppishness ; and though they

sometimes strongly resembled impertinence, no one dreamed of taking offence at anything said by Handsome Hervey. Indeed his sayings were regarded as oracular as those of the Delphian oracle, and were just as likely to be quarrelled with.

“I am particularly glad to see you,” repeated her Royal Highness. “Where have you been hiding yourself all the time you have been away from us?”

“My rascal gave me a damp pocket handkerchief; and as a natural consequence I have been confined to my chamber by a villanous cold for the last three weeks,” answered the beau, in a drawling lack-a-daisy style, as though every word put him to an immense degree of fatigue in its utterance.

“How shocking!” exclaimed the sympathising Princess, not exactly understanding the cause of the gentleman’s indisposition; “I hope your Lordship is now convalescent.”

“As well as can be expected,” replied the gentleman. “I wonder it was’nt the death of me; but I am pretty well recovered, for I can now take every day at least half a glass of asses’ milk, and the best part of a sponge-cake. Indeed my appetite is quite ungentleel — shockingly

voracious — monstrous healthy, 'pon my veracity !”

“ You are looking delicate, certainly,” observed her Royal Highness, glancing at his extremely fair complexion ; “ but I should have thought a generous diet would have been more beneficial. I hope, however, you are strong enough to attend me. I particularly wish to introduce your Lordship to a lady.”

“ Is the lady presentable ?” inquired the exquisite, with something extremely like disinclination in his countenance.

“ She is the loveliest creature of all the King’s lovely guests,” replied the Princess, rising with a bow to her learned friends, as a sort of courteous dismissal of them. “ We will go and find her out : I shall feel much gratified by your dancing with her.”

“ I never dance,” said the beau determinedly. “ 'Pon my veracity it is a monstrous deal too fatiguing an amusement for a man of fashion. The last ball, I ventured to stand up ; but egad, I paid dearly for my folly ; for after going through the first three bars of a minuet, I was so completely knocked up, I could’nt rise from my couch for a week after.”

“Dear me, how very singular!” exclaimed the Princess, quite concerned that her companion should be in so very feeble a state. “But you will at least accompany me through the rooms. I should like to hear your Lordship’s opinion of my young friend.”

“Well, there can’t be any objection to that,” observed the gentleman, graciously acceding to so much of her Royal Highness’s request ; and with infinite condescension he followed her steps, now attending with the air of a patron to her observations as they proceeded, and now acknowledging with the civility of a Prince, the notice he received from those of his distinguished friends who recognised him.

In the mean time Mary Lepel had been dancing “Sir Roger de Coverley” with the Duke of Whar-ton, who put forth all his powers of pleasing to create a favourable impression on his lovely partner. Never had his Grace taken such pains to be entertaining. He spoke of what he had seen in his travels ; he mentioned the most fashionable amusements ; he repeated the last new jests. He had something to say on every subject, and into every subject managed to infuse as large a dose of flattery as he thought it would bear. He

tried to excite his companion's curiosity by his descriptions of the marvels that were to be seen in town, from the Italian Opera to Mrs. Salmon's waxwork, and failed not to be equally eloquent in his notices of the Puppets, the Dumb Conjuror, and the Masquerade.

The Brigadier's daughter listened, apparently well pleased with the pains taken to amuse her. She had heard much of the wildness of the Duke of Wharton; but vice in high quarters was not then held in such reprobation as it deserved; and the Duke was an extremely handsome young man, very animated, and full of that conversational talent so agreeable to the fair sex. She did not sufficiently dislike him; and when with something like a tender solicitude he pressed her to accept his escort to the refreshment-room—she could not muster sufficient resolution to decline.

It was here when the pure-minded Mary Lepel was intently engaged receiving the civilities of the greatest libertine in town with an appearance of gratification, the Princess of Wales and Handsome Hervey approached; the former was not quite pleased to behold her young friend in such company—the latter did not at first notice the Duke. His attention was absorbed by the sylph-

like figure and angel face that attracted his gaze as soon as he entered the apartment.

The Princess advanced, and playfully, yet with an air almost affectionate, introduced her Maid of Honour to her Consort's Gentleman of the Bed-chamber. Whether his so lately expressed determination against dancing had changed in consequence of the very favourable impression the graceful creature made on him, or whether he had entirely lost sight of it, is not quite clear ; certain it is when in a style that would have satisfied the great Duchess, Mary Lepel received the introduction of the particularly fine gentleman the Princess had brought her, her curtsy being as faultless as his bow, he in very courteous terms begged the honour of joining her in a minuet. She as courteously signified her acquiescence, and he led her back to the dancing-room, accompanied by the Princess. The Duke of Wharton appeared greatly inclined to quarrel on this abduction of his fascinating partner ; but he satisfied himself with a few half-smothered execrations, and then followed them.

The band were soon heard playing the "Minuet de la Cour," and when Handsome Hervey was noticed leading the favourite Maid of Honour into

the centre of the room, a circle was made round them by the other dancers, anxious to see the performance of two persons so celebrated.

Of all dances the true dance of the ball-room is the minuet. The country-dance is matchless among social dances; but for a couple who wish to have the amusement to themselves, there is nothing that will bear a moment's comparison with the minuet. It is peculiarly the dance of the polite world, requiring both birth and breeding for the due performance of its evolutions. It has been superseded by the meaningless quadrille, the twirling waltz, and half-a-dozen extravagant exhibitions in which a gentleman and a gentlewoman of the good old days, such as it took to go through a minuet properly, would have been ashamed of being seen engaged.

The minuet too, far more than any of its numerous rivals, is the dance devoted to the lover and his mistress. There is an air of refinement in its grace, and of sentiment in its motion, which is more consonant with the delicacy of true affection than the pully-hawly manœuvres so fashionable at the present day. Yes, there are dances for every country, and almost every description of person. Morris-dances, jigs, Highland flings,

reels, hornpipes, and other rustic amusements, up to quadrilles, Spanish-dances, vales, and polkas ; but the only dance to which a gentleman should invite a lady is the Minuet de la Cour.

And this was the general impression in the palace, as the music commenced its slow and dignified measure, and the very handsome and very well-dressed pair placed themselves in attitude for the dance. Certainly it was impossible to have found amongst that gay and gallant assembly a couple so well matched. Handsome Hervey was acknowledged the best made and best dressed man in his Majesty's dominions, notwithstanding his slight shape and delicate features. Of Mary Lepel either as regarded the admirable style of her dress, or the unrivalled loveliness of her form and features, there could be no second opinion ; therefore there was nothing singular in the buzz of admiration this incomparable couple elicited amongst the crowd by whom they were encircled, as they glided through the first portion of their performance.

Among this circle were many persons who seemed to take more than an ordinary interest in the dancers. Easily distinguishable in the mass of faces was the sarcastic glance of the superci-

lious Bothmar, and the Silenus ogle of the haughty Duke of Somerset; the leaden visage of the Prince of Wales, and the sensual gaze of the Duke of Wharton. There, too, the Duke of Buckingham's fubsy face was in close approximation to the Duke of Devonshire's double chin, and the yellow cheeks of shrivelled profligates crowded side by side with the plumper faces of youthful rakes.

The other sex also furnished its gazers in equal variety, from the wondering damsel looking on the scene as an earthly Heaven, to the antiquated dowager who pronounced it inconceivably beneath the consideration of any one who had seen how such things were done in her youthful days.

Handsome Hervey as he noticed the perfect grace with which his fair young partner began the first bars of the minuet, and the attention she and himself were exciting, appeared to shake off the foppish apathy which had hitherto marked his movements, and to throw all the refinement and elegance he had at his command, into the performance of his portion of the dance. He forgot the fatigue he had complained of; and never had he appeared to so much advantage, Even those who had most severely condemned his affectations

were, in spite of their prejudices, charmed into enthusiasm in his favour. Indeed the ladies spoke of him as something very little lower than an angel.

The Brigadier's daughter could not but remember how indifferently she had executed this dance before the dreaded Duchess of Marlborough; but her feelings now were very different. Proud of the absorbed attention she was exciting, proud of the acquisition of so distinguished a partner, whom she was half inclined to admit was in a minuet an excellent substitute for the never-to-be-forgotten Prince Oroondates, proud of the position in which she was placed, a position which Cassandra, or Clelia, or Cleopatra, she was positive, could not but have been extremely pleased with, Mary Lepel threw her whole heart and soul into the performance in which she was engaged, and the result was that even in the stately court of Louis Quatorze never had so graceful a being trod the measures of that graceful dance. She floated over the boards like a creature of light; now retiring, now approaching, bending with a winning humility, rising with admirable majesty, till some of the enraptured spectators seemed to gaze with a sort of incredulity of her earthly na-

ture. How many hearts she gained by her matchless dancing it is quite impossible to calculate; but there was scarcely a male in the assembly who did not experience the most passionate admiration of her every movement.

The crowd had greatly increased : there was a vast congregation of lords of the bedchamber, grooms of the stole, equerries, and the other Court officials. The refreshment-rooms had been thinned, even the card-tables had given up more than half their occupants; but a more attentive crowd could not have been found. Indeed, at the conclusion of the minuet they were so absorbed they noticed not the excitement that shook the frame of their sovereign, who had also become a gazer.

“Ah, God!” he muttered in German, as he turned from the scene, knocking his clenched fist against his forehead; “just so she moved along with the handsome young Count when I first beheld her in her father’s palace. Oh fool! fool!”

The gavotte followed the minuet, and the hearts that had remained struggling against the fascinations of her slow movements, surrendered to the charm of the fair dancer’s more lively but not more graceful evolutions. Never had a cou-

ple retired from an admiring audience leaving so powerful an impression behind them. The ladies looked upon Handsome Hervey as an Apollo ; the gentlemen appeared as thoroughly enamoured of the Maid of Honour. Had there been opportunity there would have been at least a hundred declarations ventured upon before the ball broke up.

“Baron,” whispered the discordant voice of the King’s favourite, “we must get rid of this girl.”

Baron Bothmar stopped as he was leaving the ball-room, and the yellowish tinge of his eyeballs looked a more intense saffron, as he returned the glance of deadly malice that met his gaze.

“Be at ease,” he replied in the same low tones, “it shall be done.”

Mary Lepel retired to her couch the happiest of the happy. The glories of a Court life seemed breaking upon her with more than meridian splendour. She fell asleep dreaming till late in the morning of grand Cyruses in velvet coats, and illustrious Bassas in brocaded vests ; and more impressively than all, of dancing a minuet with the incomparable Prince Oroondates, in pearl-coloured stockings, and breeches of the most deli-

cate pink satin. In short, she was as well pleased as the most fortunate of heroines could be.

Little did she dream of the snares that surrounded her ; of the deadly hatred she had stirred up ; of the licentious hopes she had excited ; of the envy, malice, and lust, that her youthful beauty had called into action ; and of the numerous schemes for her destruction that had been plotted, entirely in consequence of the extraordinary impression she had created at the State Ball at St. James's.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HELL-FIRE CLUB, AND THE MOHOCKS.

Pretty, in Nature's various plan,
To see a weed that's like a man ;
But 'tis a grievous thing indeed,
To see a man so like a weed !

SMART.

THROUGH a reeking atmosphere of tobacco smoke it was scarcely possible, on a stranger's first entrance, to distinguish the individuals sitting round a long table well supplied with punch-bowls, glasses and candles, whose clay pipes were giving forth that dense volume of vapour that made their persons and the different objects around them so obscure. It was not till some moments' familiarity with the place enabled the spectator to discover by the struggling light of

the unsnuffed candles, that he was in the club-room of a tavern.

The walls possessed decorations peculiar to such places. There were the rules of the society over the heavy chimney-piece, supported on one side by a cock-fight, and on the other by a portrait of one of the heroes of Hockly-in-the-Hole. There was a Dutch drinking bout, a gaudy Bacchus and Ariadne, a flaunting Venus and Adonis, and several other pictures of a more questionable character distributed in various places with little order and less decency. A row of hats of different shapes hung upon pegs, with here and there a formidable stick with an ugly clump at the top.

The chairs were the usual substantial heavy things with hard leathern seats, and they were arranged or rather disarranged round the capacious table with a spittoon between every two. At the head of this table stood a cumbrous arm-chair raised above the level of the floor—the presidential seat, where the master of the revels or chairman took his station with a little hammer, to call attention by knocking on the table. Some people have imagined that the hammer was employed to bring the members to order: but as

the club we are going to describe assembled only for the promotion of *disorder*, such could not be the case in this instance.

In those chairs lounged in the most easy and careless attitudes imaginable, certain of the King's faithful lieges—some with one leg on the ledge of the table, some with two, some with legs thrown over the arms of their chairs, some with all members stretched out, like signs of the spread eagle; and who if there had been a college of blackguards established in his Majesty's dominions would have been qualified to take the highest degrees. They certainly were not all alike, these black sheep of his London flock; there were nice shades in their comparative nastiness, and very evident distinctions in their very evident profligacy; but one spirit seemed to unite them in one brotherhood. It was a spirit of outrage against the ordinary decencies of society, and against social order and honest government. It was a club held by a band of reckless dare-devils who infested the town, whose manners were as vile as their morals; who were ready to say anything from which the better disposed would revolt, and do anything which even the most disorderly would endeavour to avoid.

Their orgies were wilder than those of savages. Oaths, vile anecdotes, viler jests and ribald songs washed down with ample draughts of punch enjoyed in a murky cloud of tobacco smoke ; with occasional interludes from forced performers, were the ordinary features of their evening symposia, till their senses became sufficiently maddened with their libations. Then they would sally out in a body, and commit such atrocities on the first unoffending passenger they chanced to meet as would become the town talk for a week.

Although such amusements, it might be thought, could be attractive only to the lowest, the most ignorant, and the most depraved of men, such was the extraordinary state of society at the date of our story, that it had become as much the fashion to get enrolled amongst this infamous coterie as it is at the present day to seek admission into the Conservative and Reform clubs ; and persons of the very highest distinction—men even proud of their family, and some with pretensions to wit and learning, were content to associate with suspected highwaymen, cock-and-bottle captains, Fleet parsons, and disgraced lawyers, who were known to have found admittance into this respectable brotherhood. Profligate

gacy and daring formed their bond of union, and drunkenness and folly their test of association.

Such was the notorious "Hell-fire Club," that so often frightened half London from its propriety in the days when George I. was King. We must now introduce the reader to the principal members, some of whom he will not fail to recognise as old acquaintances. In the President's chair sat the youngest and wildest member of the community, the half drunk and whole debauched Duke of Wharton; his face was blackened and his person disguised in a flax wig and a horse-man's coat—possibly to escape recognition; possibly as a freak of fancy; but there could be no question of his identity. The Duke was undoubtedly the Lucifer of that Pandemonium.

Next him sat a man of worthier mould, but terribly misled by a thoughtless eccentricity, and a foolish daring, to disgrace himself with discreditable associates. He had on the uniform of an old Chelsea pensioner, but there was still so much of the hero about him that his friends would find no difficulty in recognising in the humble veteran that great General, the Earl of Peterborough. Close to him were two or three seniors who would have been ashamed of becoming actors in such a

scene had not all sense of shame long departed from them, and had they not become used to follies so inconsistent with their time of life. The lean man, whose loss of teeth drew in his mouth like a sewn up button hole, though he wore a patch that half concealed his face, and had got on a huntsman's coat and riding wig, with stockings over his knees, was no other than the proud Duke of Somerset. His Grace could never be brought to acknowledge the acquaintance of humble men of good character—for a prouder man than the proud Duke of Somerset did not exist;—but misled by a vicious fashion and his own licentious disposition, he was here hail fellow well met with some of the most notorious rakes and bullies about town: trusting to his disguise to preserve him from any inconvenient familiarity with persons whom he chose to consider his inferiors.

His opposite neighbour, so conspicuous with the green spectacles and flabby cheeks, though he passed for a physician, was John Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham; a nobleman who had distinguished himself in the world of letters, though it might be said he had used the Muses in the derogatory employment of go-betweens, in affairs from which

those highly respectable ladies were not likely to escape without injury to their reputations. In short, his Grace, like his brother of Somerset, and many other noblemen equally advanced in years, enjoyed a name for gallantry which they were extremely desirous to maintain. Close to him, in the Quaker suit, was the Duke of Kingston—another of these old gallants—speaking to a younger man in a full bottomed perriwig and a counsellor's gown, who was Anthony Lowther.

At the other end of the table were a motley lot to whom disguise seemed quite unnecessary. Many were of broken fortunes, which their faded finery too readily betrayed. Spendthrift heirs, with needy younger brothers and ruined gamblers, who did not disdain putting themselves to discreditable shifts to enable them to enjoy themselves after their own fashion. Indeed it had been said of some that they were extremely unprejudiced, and would not object to rob or swear to any extent, provided they were rewarded handsomely by their employers, and that a due respect was paid to their feelings as *gentlemen*; and others, if they possessed more old fashioned notions, would do things in the way of cheating

tradesmen and betraying women, equally worthy of a Tyburn elevation.

At the other end of the table was a tall, thick shouldered, pale complexioned man, whose hawk-like countenance was handsomely set off with a profusion of little red pimples, which if they added little to his beauty could have taken little from it, for it happened to be in that state of negativeness which vanity itself could not have made a charm out of. He wore a sort of laced military coat, rather the worse for wear, and bore a kind of military title which assuredly could not be the better for the use he put it to. This worthy was extremely well known about town, especially in the purlieus of Covent Garden. To be sure, he had been kicked out of Will's, as it was very likely he had been out of many other coffee-houses; and his nose had been pulled in Drury Lane—but that member doubtless owed its prominence to the frequency with which it had been so handled. Nevertheless, for a cock-and-bottle captain, Captain Spatterdash was a most respectable person.

He was supported on his right by a sallow faced, bull-headed fellow, with a pug nose and somewhat pugnacious expression of countenance,

in a worn out Ramillies wig, and a threadbare velvet coat extremely stained with liquor. This was a man worth any body's money who wanted anything done he had neither courage nor inclination to do himself. No one could help him so well as Bully Swag. He was not a fellow to stick at trifles; he would do his job, however dangerous it might be, in the most perfect and workmanlike manner possible, and was ready from pure love of mischief either to lead or to follow in the performance of any atrocity which the Hell-fire club might think it necessary to entertain.

On his left was a round red face, in a woollen night-cap, the body belonging to it being enveloped in a clergyman's rusty frock, and bands. The owner of this apparel was as well known about Fleet Street, as the giants at St. Dunstons. He was Parson Fuddle;—a choice specimen of a species of priest, which we trust has become extinct in these islands:—a swearing, swaggering, swigging profligate, who knew little of the religion of which he professed to be a minister, and thought less.

Opposite to him sat a jaundiced little man with ferrety eyes, and a remarkably black muzzle. His suit was of the true Temple cut; and his jests of the true Temple extravagance. In short he was

the great Counsellor Quibble :—a limb of the law worthy of a high place in the devil's chancery ; and esteemed above all his learned brethren as standing counsel of a community of which the Duke of Wharton was President.

In addition to the members we have named there was Tom Pepper, and Jack Wildair, and Dick Rumpus, and a few others of less note, who had not distinguished themselves so prominently as to call for particular description—were mere common-place scapegraces, to whom it is not necessary we should further allude.

While we have been sketching this much celebrated club, those inestimable members of society of which it was formed were conducting themselves in that peculiarly riotous and disorderly manner, so characteristic of their revelries, or devilries. Laughing, shouting, singing, swearing, mingled together in one uproarious saturnalia ; and the vapour still continued to rise from their mouths, and the punch still continued to fall down their throats, as the night wore on. Bacchanalian chorusses were succeeded by political ballads, and amorous ditties by maccaronic songs ; and sometimes two or more went on together, and not unfrequently a racy speech, or a licentious anecdote

was being delivered at the same time. For the Hell-fire Club allowed every member to do as he liked, except drink his neighbour's punch, or make a spittoon of his hat.

A fresh supply of punch had been called in amid the shouts and noisy mirth of the company ; and at both ends of the table an animated discussion was being carried on, of which the most prominent feature chanced to be the oaths and ribaldry with which it was seasoned. At the lower end Parson Fuddle was holding an argument with Counsellor Quibble, on the merits of two beauties from the purlieus of old Drury. Captain Spatterdash having been appealed to, had pretended to know a great deal more about them than the disputants were inclined to allow, which brought Bully Swag to join in the argument, who was a pretty good authority in such cases, having an extensive acquaintance with ladies of that description. But this might also be said of many of his associates ; and knowing themselves to be especially qualified to take their share in such a dispute, Tom Pepper, Jack Wildair, and Dick Rumpus were as vociferous, and as positive as any of them.

At the head of the table the discussion was not

quite so fierce, but was equally loud; and here also "woman, lovely woman," was the chosen subject. The conversation consisted almost entirely of scandalous anecdotes; of narratives of boasted triumphs; and of accounts of successful intrigues. The younger members, such as the Duke of Wharton, and Anthony Lowther, were not remarkable for modesty; but they were completely out-crowded by the self-exalting stories volunteered by the antiquated Dukes of Somerset, Buckingham, and Kingston. Amongst them the female character was shockingly bespattered; and no one could have imagined that the Lady Babs, and the Mrs. Trueloves, and the Kitty Clovers, and the numberless other maids, wives, and widows, then and there mentioned by these worthies, could have had so little virtue as appeared from what was said against them.

In the height of the discussion, when every member appeared in the fifth heaven of self-complacency, the hammer of the President was heard beating a long and sharp tattoo to call the contending wranglers for Jenny Diver, and Betty Shortshins, to attend to him. One by one they left the war of words; and at last, with the assistance of Captain Spatterdash's powerful

lungs, there was so much of peace restored as gave the young Duke an impression there might now be a chance of his meeting with the attention he required.

“Dare-devils!—fire-eaters!—bloods, and blades of metal!” exclaimed the Duke, amid a perfect hurricane of knockings at the table, and other noisy demonstrations of favour. “You all know that your President at every meeting must toast some new beauty whose charms should make her worthy of such an honour.”

“A deuced good system, strike me dumb!” said the apparent Chelsea pensioner, puffing away seriously at his long clay pipe.

“And at the same time,” continued the Duke, “some member should engage to gain her favour within a limited time; which if he fail in doing, he shall be accounted a milk-sop, and a molly-coddle, and no longer fit for the company of fellows of spirit.”

“Capital law! have often fulfilled it!” exclaimed the Duke of Buckingham, as with a tremulous hand he took his pipe from his mouth.

“Yes; a devilish sensible law, indeed,” added the old Duke of Somerset. “I would I could

gain back the years in which I have thus signalized myself."

"I don't see any harm in such a law," said the Duke of Kingston. "It is at once like dealing in musk and ambergrease:—both pleasant and profitable."

"Full glasses, and be hanged to you!" cried the President authoritatively, as he glanced along the table on both sides. "Let your punch be strong and hot, like your blood. I propose for your toast, a beauty more ravishing than any mind the most familiar with women can conceive."

"Smash me—but she must be a rare one!" exclaimed Parson Fuddle.

"Is every member ready?" asked the Duke of Wharton, observing that each had his full glass of punch before him.

"All!—all!" exclaimed different voices.

"Here's to the matchless Molly Lepel!" exclaimed the Duke, standing up with the glass in his hand. "And may all who fail to join me in the toast, be rammed, crammed, jammed, and d——d; grilled, broiled, fried, and pitchforked; toasted, roasted, stewed, and barbacued, to all time and eternity, and as much longer as may be convenient, then and ever after, amen."

The President drank off his bumper at a draught, and every one of the members in rotation took his pipe from his mouth, drank the toast standing, in exactly the same words, and with the same solemnity. Then followed a burst of applause, and a loud knocking of the table making a din that defies description.

“I rise, Mr. President,” exclaimed the Duke of Buckingham as soon as the riot subsided, “to claim that the usual period be allowed me for gaining possession of the incomparable creature—”

“No; I’ll be hanged if you shall!” cried the Duke of Somerset, rising hastily, and interrupting his associate. “This is an honour I have set my heart upon. I hope our brother will withdraw his pretensions. I am determined to have her, curse me! and will leave no engine unturned to obtain so glorious a prize.”

“Ah, Squire; are you there? Doctor, your most obedient,” cried the Duke of Wharton, half sarcastically, half jocosely. “You both then are desirous of entering for this race, which I must therefore suppose is open to all ages.” A loud laugh from the other end of the table rewarded the witticism. “But allow me,” he continued,

“to add another competitor. Even I, the President of the Hell-fire Club, and Emperor of the Mohocks, have determined to take my chance !”

This announcement was received with uproarious applause.

“Every one to his taste,” said the Duke of Kingston ; “but I’m for the lovely Bellen-den.”

“And I for the ravishing Sophy Howe !” cried Anthony Lowther ; “and I’ll wager a cool hundred I am the first to secure my conquest.”

“Done, done, done !” eagerly said the enamoured noblemen, and instantly each made bets, backing his own powers of seduction against those of his adversaries. Another bowl of punch was called in, and other toasts given, and the spirits of the licentious crew were rising higher and higher ; and their boastings over the sex, and satisfaction in their own wild excesses, louder and more extravagant every minute.

It was difficult to say which end of the table was noisiest, or which most enthusiastic ; the admirers of the Maids of Honour of the Princess of Wales, or the friends and supporters of the frail favourites in the popular establishment of Mother Bang. In short the members of the club

were getting extremely energetic—the most quiet showing a genius for elocution which might have made his fortune at the Cocoa Tree—and gained a splendid reputation at the Tilt-yard ; but though no one could be pronounced as possessing any pretensions to be considered orderly or respectable, their youthful President certainly exhibited a superiority in the common qualities of the club, which shewed how truly deserving he was of the distinguished place he held amongst them.

A new impulse was given to their proceedings by the sudden influx into the room of several rakish-looking, half-intoxicated young men disguised, whose persons however seemed well-known to the whole club ; for they were recognized with a shout of welcome, and a volley of oaths and execrations of the most friendly and amiable character. It was not perceived at first that the new comers brought a stranger with them ; but at last the President's attention was directed to a personage in a half-Asiatic, half-European costume, who was being rudely jostled up to him by some of the most daring of those who had just entered the room. He ventured to make some appeals, and to express some threats ; but though they were uttered in half-a-dozen

different languages, they neither appeared to be understood nor appreciated.

The leader of his captors, for it soon appeared he was a prisoner, in a humourous speech, too full of impieties to be transferred to this work, made their President, whom they addressed as "his imperial highness Muley Anthropophagus, Emperor of the Mohocks," acquainted with their having had the honour of meeting, close to their place of meeting, that illustrious and estimable Court favourite, so well known on the Back-stairs of St. James's by the name of Mustapha the Turk; and knowing the great desire the emperor and the rest of the Mohocks had to be acquainted with that influential friend and follower of his Majesty, they, in the gentlest and most affectionate manner possible, forced him into the imperial presence.

Mustapha hardly knew what to make of the strange-looking group by whom he was surrounded; but the name of the Mohocks filled him with dread, as it would have done at the time any other quietly disposed person. The Turk, however, had other causes of fear. He knew the little love the English entertained for the foreigners the King had brought into their

country, and anticipated harsh treatment at their hands should he be placed in a position where his influence at Court could no longer shield him. He was not allowed to remain long undisturbed ; for he was assailed on all sides with questions he might have found it extremely difficult to answer, touching certain proceedings in the Palace which he had fancied could not be known outside its walls.

He turned bewildered from one strange face to another as each attacked him ; and getting alarmed, made singular and incoherent answers which seemed greatly to amaze his audience. Many of the queries related to the King's mistresses, and were of a peculiarly private character. Poor Mustapha strove to evade them, or to plead ignorance ; but he was soon so pressed and so badgered, that he was forced into giving replies to this catechism, which he would have been sorry enough to have made in the hearing of either of the ladies alluded to. Then there were other secrets he found himself obliged to divulge, chiefly relating to the corruption carried on by himself and his colleagues in the sale of government appointments. The fact was, he was getting very frightened ; and he was cross-examined in a style

very far from being agreeable either to Turk or Christian.

His examination, however, did not last very long, though it seemed to excite an immense deal of amusement; for the Duke of Wharton, in his double capacity of Emperor of the Mohocks, and President of the Hell-Fire Club, rose, and in a remarkably soothing speech, assured the alarmed Mahometan that he ought to feel at home, as he was surrounded by fellows who were undoubtedly "as great Turks as himself," and that he and all of them felt so much respect for him personally, that they were in one mind to prove to him before he departed, how much they felt inclined to place him *above themselves*.

Mustapha was about, with a great deal of gratitude, to return thanks for the honour they were inclined to do him; but on a telegraphic communication from their chairman, the members at the lower end of the table rose from their seats. Captain Spatterdash, with a cordial execration, begged the honour of Mr. Mustapha's company in the garden; Bully Swag, with a most friendly oath, requested permission to accompany him: Counsellor Quibble and Parson Fuddle then presented themselves to pay their respects,

and d—d him for a good fellow very heartily; and Tom Pepper, Jack Wildair, and Dick Rumpus, overwhelmed him with civilities no less impressive.

The Page of the Back-stairs took these advances as so many compliments, and was profuse in his acknowledgments. The windows at the back of the room were found to open into a considerable piece of garden ground; and when the company had there arrived, whilst some took off his attention, others were busily engaged at a little distance lighting several links, as it was too dark to see clearly without them; and several of the strongest of the party had spread on the ground an immense blanket, strengthened with sail cloth.

When everything was prepared, Mustapha, much more easy in his mind in consequence of the courteous attentions he had been receiving, was invited to try the softness of the carpet of honour they had been spreading for him to sit on in true Oriental fashion. He advanced with alacrity, and so did his particular friends; he squatted himself cross-legged without hesitation, and in the next moment, much to his consternation and the mirth of his new associates, found

himself high in the air, falling down with an alarming velocity into a blanket stretched out to receive him by several pairs of powerful arms.

In vain he shrieked, swore, prayed, threatened, and entreated, in Turkish, Arabic, German, French and English; up he went in the air amid the deafening shouts of the assembled Mohocks, many of whom stood smoking their pipes, and enjoying the scene to their heart's content, whilst others held up the lighted flambeaux to throw as much light as possible on a scene so picturesque. Such a medley of Turkish prayers, German abuse, French oaths, and English promises, never was heard before. The disturbance caused many of the neighbouring windows to be thrown open; and when these spectators were told that one of the King's Turks was being tossed in a blanket, they seemed to enjoy the jest as much as those who were acting it, and encouraged his summer-sets with a vast deal of critical judgment.

At last the strong arms of the operators at the blanket wearied of their labour, and after giving "a long pull, and a strong pull, and a pull altogether," which appeared to send the unfortunate Mahometan half-way on his road to Paradise, they allowed him to regain his legs more dead

than alive. But as soon as he recovered the use of his limbs, he dashed out of the garden through the club-room, and was so fortunate as to find his way into the street. Then he commenced running with a speed he had never known before. The dreaded Mohocks, however, hastily put on their hats, and sallied after him, screeching and hallooing like a pack of ravenous wolves after a stray horse. He fled, screaming as he went, "Mohocks! Mohocks!" which was quite enough to clear the streets of their passengers, who darted into houses, or disappeared down allies and courts as fast as they could.

On rushed the young Duke of Wharton with his wild and reckless followers at his heels. Not a watchman crossed his path, not a constable came within sight; in fact the Strand seemed to be deserted, till the troop suddenly near Lillie's, the perfumer's at the corner of Beaufort Buildings came upon a sedan, the bearers of which had fled on hearing that cry of such alarming significance the frantic Mustapha had raised. In the belief that the chair was empty, the leader opened the door; but his exclamation of surprise soon brought ample assistance round him to drag out the trembling figure of Count Bernstorff.

These Hanoverians were always fair game, and little ceremony was used with the Count, notwithstanding he went on his knees in the most abject manner and prayed for mercy.

“A sweat, a sweat!” cried a dozen voices; and in a moment out flashed as many swords, the points of which were applied to the calves of the suppliant’s legs and other fleshy parts of his body in a manner that made him yell and bound like a madman. This extraordinary agility was received with shouts of applause by his tormentors, whose weapons again goaded him till he screamed with the pain; they then proceeded to “tip him the lion,” and to perform other tricks for which they had become celebrated. The blood was streaming through his stockings, and the perspiration rolled down his face in hot drops as he jumped about, and shouted, and prayed, and cursed by turns; till maddened by an unexpected application of a sword’s point to his hind quarters, he made one desperate plunge forward, broke through the pitiless Mohocks and fled with the speed of the wind.

“Now for Mother Bang’s!” exclaimed the young Duke, and with a fresh chorus of yelling and screeching, the whole party rushed along the

Strand till they came to Bedford Street; and then made but a short journey to Maiden Lane, where at the door of a house lighted by a dim oil lamp, stood two women dressed in the extreme of fashion as if they had just quitted a ball at the palace, with patches on their painted faces, gay head-dresses with top-knots, hoop-petticoats, and having fans in their hands.

One of the ladies embraced Parson Fuddle with a lively oath, and the other rushed as amicably upon the Duke as if she intended to smother him, swearing most lustily it was so long since she had set eyes on him, she was afraid he'd been hanged; but the gentlemen so honoured had no time to express how much they liked their reception, for their associates dashed up with all the fury of savages; and Jenny Diver and Betty Shortshins with the Duke and the Parson were carried in with the rush, and very shortly found themselves joining in the shouting, and screaming, and other vociferous greetings of welcome that came from about a dozen gaudily decked out women, who with the notorious Mother Bang herself were found in an inner apartment.

CHAPTER VII.

OUR HEROINE AT ST. JAMES'S.

So powerful her charms and so moving,
They would warm an old Monk in his cell,
Should the Pope himself ever go roaming,
He would follow dear Molly Lepel.

LORD CHESTERFIELD.

OUR Maids of Honour were by this time in the full enjoyment of a Court life; were becoming as familiar with their duties as with their associates; and were as much at home in St. James's as they had been in the paternal domicile. Indeed, it might be said of Sophy Howe, that she was too much at home in the palace, for she behaved with a freedom that often scandalised her best friends; flirting with every gentleman who approached her, from the Prince to his

pages, and apparently as careless of what she did as she was of what might be said of it.

In this abandonment, however, there seemed more sauciness than vice. Omnipotent in the possession of youth and beauty, and full of animal spirits, her bright black eyes shone with a provoking lustre that attracted towards her every handsome fellow who had his head-quarters at Court. They rivalled each other in paying her the most devoted attention, and she delighted and enraged them all by turns, by appearing greatly to favour one, and then to drop him for a rival.

Nothing was known of her absolutely immoral; but a great deal that was scarcely to be tolerated in an age when unusual license was allowed to women of quality—a license by the way which too many of them abused. Sophy Howe seemed to glory in saying and doing the most improper things; but though many censorious persons chose to think of her very ill for so doing, others regarded her behaviour merely as arising from the wanton extravagance of excessive animal spirits, and considered her much more trustworthy than many a studiously correct lady.

She had plenty of suitors and seemed to amuse

herself equally with them all ; but Anthony Lowther was not amongst them. He kept at a sort of reconnoitring distance, and though she seemed piqued at his indifference, she only smiled the more upon the well satisfied captives she held in her chains.

Fanny Meadows though growing more familiar with Court manners, was not to be reconciled to the little freedoms many gentlemen of the Court thought proper to take with her ; and did all she could by the assumption of a solemn and dignified demeanour to keep such persons at a due distance. This conduct was remarked by the gay spirits who surrounded her, and it often created considerable amusement when a fair occasion offered for attacking it. She also had declared suitors, but it appeared as though they only assumed that character to afford entertainment to the rest of the circle.

Mary Bellenden appeared to be proceeding with the most intense satisfaction. She soon made it evident she had not been to Paris for nothing, for she exhibited extraordinary talent in the manner in which she retained around her the different gallants her Parisian graces had enabled her to fascinate. Colonel Argyle, how-

ever, was only to be kept in his place by the most skilful treatment, as he was of a temperament that could not relish the even handed justice his mistress prided herself on dispensing. He could not understand the encouragement she seemed to afford to the advances of the gay old Duke of Kingston, and the attention she gave to the coarse and awkward gallantries of the Prince of Wales. The honest soldier did not exactly like this, and often held aloof from her as if about to remove his affections to safer quarters. But Lord Bellenden's daughter was much too perfect a Frenchwoman to permit a duke's brother to escape from her fascinations, and she invariably contrived by some well timed favour to keep him within their sphere; and this too without being obliged to free herself from the pleasing gallantries of his rivals.

But "Molly Lepel," as she was now familiarly styled, seemed the happiest if not the gayest of her fair school-fellows; and much reason had she, as she fancied, to be not only happier than her school favourites, but happier even than the most enviable of heroines that ever gave interest to a ten volumed romance. For she found herself enjoying the confidence of her royal mistress, who

never tired of giving her good advice respecting the behaviour of the gentlemen of the Court ; and when in the presence of her “good Howard,” her Royal Highness would warn her against the attentions of such gentlemen, who it was not decorous to encourage ; she of course alluding to the gallantries of her lord, and reminding her conscience-stricken bedchamber woman of the sin she had committed in accepting the Prince’s attentions : a species of punishment she never failed to inflict at every favourable opportunity.

The good Princess then, if not inclined to dilate upon philosophy, would break forth into the warmest encomiums on the nobleman she had introduced to the young Maid of Honour on the night of the State Ball ; representing him as a model of everything that was graceful and refined in manhood. The Brigadier’s daughter was, to tell the truth, rather more amused than enraptured by the affectations of Handsome Hervey, and could scarcely help laughing when the image of that extremely refined beau with all his affectations, rose before her mind ; nevertheless she was not ill-pleased by his demeanour towards her, nor uninfluenced by the access of fame bestowed upon her in consequence of his attentions. After dancing the

minuet, the great man had been asked his opinion of the new beauty by a coterie of the most zealous of his disciples, and had gone so far as to say that for a Maid of Honour she was by no means so *very plain*.

His opinion, characteristic as it was, went a great way in her favour, and innumerable were the civil speeches and tender gallantries it procured her. Handsome Hervey now happened to be thrown a good deal into her society, and he condescended occasionally to converse with her, and on being interrogated by his imitators and admirers as to his opinion of her talents, was so good as to allow that he might have known individuals of her sex less rational in their conversation.

Notwithstanding the prodigious reputation Handsome Hervey enjoyed, his quiet and extremely refined approaches had no chance against the brilliant manœuvres and daring strategy of our heroine's more active admirers. At the head of this list, a pretty extensive one, was the profligate Duke of Wharton. His gallantry was of the most dashing character. He laid siege to her affections in the style of one of those brilliant adventurers of the middle ages, who never thought of wasting time in preliminary movements against any place

before which his force appeared. He seemed satisfied that a creature so inexperienced must become an easy prey.

Philip Dormer had recourse to different tactics. He was graceful and pleasant, studied the lady's tastes, flattered her prejudices, employed the most delicate flattery, and left nothing which could touch the heart or turn the head of so youthful a beauty.

The Dukes of Buckingham and Somerset were also in the field, as they often were rivals in affairs of gallantry, and they brought with them forces on which great reliance had always been placed ; but their chief reliance was on vanity, that weak corner in the fortifications of female chastity. They had a powerful competitor in the Prince of Wales, who seemed desirous of possessing the fortress by attacking it in the same direction. He was, however, far too clumsy in his proceedings to give them any apprehension.

There was yet another rival, though a secret one—one as unknown in that character to the Maid of Honour as to the throng of courtly worshippers who crowded round her wherever she went. But, though the admiration she openly received from them was not without danger to

her, the admiration of which she knew nothing was as deadly as the nightshade. It followed her like a perpetual evil eye in all her amusements, dogged her steps to Kensington Gardens, haunted her at the ring, watched her at the play, and accompanied her in all her shoppings, bargainings, and visits from one part of town to another.

The King's mistresses had seen with jaundiced eyes that made their ugliness absolutely hideous, the immense impression created by the appearance at Court of the young attendants of the Princess of Wales; but the extraordinary effect Mary Lepel had made on the King alarmed them, and their hatred that might have been bestowed on her companions was concentrated on herself. Many an important consultation had been held in Mademoiselle Schulenburg's private apartments of all the principal Hanoverians, male and female, and they were unanimously of opinion that the impression the Brigadier's daughter had created on their sovereign threatened their influence, and every one seemed to feel satisfied of the necessity of getting rid of it as quickly and as summarily as possible. There could be no doubt of the deadly wish of the gaunt Medusa who appeared to think her vested rights in the King were about to be

disputed, and that bulky mass of garbage, her obsequious associate, was well inclined to echo her sentiments.

Their male companions were equally interested in the question. Baron Bothmar was as callous as a Spanish inquisitor. Count Bernstorff still smarting from the rough treatment he had received at the hands of the Mohocks, would readily have volunteered to play the office of executioner to any one who belonged to the country of his tormentors ; and Count Robethon had too much *esprit de corps* not to be equally incensed against the formidable Maid of Honour.

Even the Turks their faithful allies were not less violent than themselves. It has been said that a fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind ; and the sympathy of the tossed and frightened Page of the Back-stairs, with the goaded and maddened Private Secretary, gave the same revengeful colouring to the thoughts of the two infidels as existed in the meditations of each of their Christian confederates.

The relationship between father and son was not now more amicable, nor could it be said to have become more belligerent. The fact was, the Princess was approaching her confinement, and

the King, who was usually particularly friendly in his conduct towards her, refrained out of respect to her delicate situation from those violent explosions of temper which her heedless consort continually provoked. This restraint his fair Hanoverian friends did not approve of, and they were extremely desirous of putting an end to it, a desire which in his singular state of excitement and irritability, and the Prince's inattention to the paternal censure, they considered there could be little difficulty in satisfying.

Their calculations, however, were doomed to be disappointed; the King, it is true, grew daily more uneasy respecting the secret cause of his disquietude, and at last dispatched his most confidential counsellor, Baron Bothmar, on a secret embassy to Hanover; the object of which was believed to be connected with it. There was much mystery in the Baron's journey, but nothing in the slightest degree relating to it was allowed to transpire.

The King was in a state of more than usual excitement during the whole of this period, was abstracted when awake, and disturbed when asleep, often muttered strange phrases to himself, the import of which no one affected to understand,

started violently at any sudden noise, would be inattentive to the speeches of his ministers, and regardless of the attentions of his friends ; was restless when alone, and when in company acted as though he was in the privacy of his own cabinet. Yet all this time he was particularly careful of saying or doing anything that might alarm his daughter-in-law ; this forbearance however, was far from being universal, for he frequently indulged in the most violent outbursts of passion against any person not connected with her who happened to offend him.

The King's mistresses finding the moment not propitious to their views, waited with the patience of revenge for a favourable opportunity. In due time the Princess was confined ; and it was reported both child and mother were "as well as could be expected." Mademoiselle Schulenburg and Madame Kielmansegge thought it high time to be doing. After many consultations it was considered that there was only one available plan for putting an end to the unaccountable fancy of their royal master for the youthful Maid of Honour, and this was to drive the Prince and his family out of the palace. To this object they now directed their strenuous endeavours.

It was the invariable custom of the King to spend so many hours at the close of the day in the private apartments of his mistresses ; the time thus passed was, as far as regarded those criminalities which such a connexion intimated, as innocent of offence as if one had been a saint and the other a vestal.

To give a correct idea of the singular character of these interviews, the reader must imagine the customary hour of meeting arrived, and the two ladies in full dress, or more correctly speaking undress, sitting in their usual places at their usual employments. The tall, bony figure of the chief favourite, closely resembling one of the celebrated spectral figures in the Dance of Death, sat apparently motionless with a German book of devotion in her hand, and a look of well preserved hypocrisy on her face. Her chair was placed at a convenient distance from a table on which there was nothing but some paper and a pair of scissors ; closer to the table was a vacant *fauteuil* richly ornamented.

At a little distance behind, the swelling proportions of her more humble-minded coadjutor were stowed in the largest arm-chair in the palace : her rubicund face, and staring black eyes in vain striving to appear sentimental and serious. She had tried to conform to the taste of her superior ;

and after enjoying herself thoroughly with the Schiedam, she had taken a book of religious discourses ; but sleep had so completely triumphed over her affectation of piety, that it had been agreed she should affect industry, and she was now found employing herself in knitting comforters and night-caps.

Mademoiselle Schulenburg looked off her book to glance at her watch ; the hand was on the very minute of the hour, and almost as soon as she made this discovery a slight knock was heard at the door ; another instant it opened ; the ladies rose, the Turkish Pages of the Back-stairs entered backwards, bearing branch silver candlesticks with wax lights ; at a due distance appeared the ungainly figure and stolid physiognomy of the King, in his ordinary snuff-coloured suit, marching awkwardly after them ; and a couple of Grooms of the Stole in their costly liveries, brought up the rear, but did not cross the threshold. A wave of the hand dismissed the attendants. The door closed on Messrs Mustapha, Mahomet and Co. The mistresses curtsied, the royal Adonis stalked on to the vacant chair, and sat himself down. The Venuses as silently resumed their seats.

Those who imagined that the royal profligate

kept his foreign mistresses for any profligate purpose would have considered themselves very much mistaken had they noticed the singular propriety that reigned in this royal harem. The King without a word took up the paper from the table in one hand, and the scissors in the other, and became intently employed in cutting out various figures—an art rarely exercised any where but in the nursery. Mademoiselle Schulenburg was equally absorbed in her devotions, and the fat fingers of Madame Kielmansegge were proceeding with her taskwork with as much regularity as if they formed a part of a clever piece of machinery.

This went on in a profound silence, undisturbed by any other sounds than the clip of the scissors, the rustle of the leaves, and the action of the knitting needles. Etiquette was preserved in that apartment most rigidly: neither lady would venture to speak until the King had spoken. “The Maypole” sat as silent and motionless, and almost as prepossessing, as the skeleton introduced at the festivals of the ancient Egyptians. “The Elephant and Castle” began to exercise a kind of desperate energy to prevent her faculties being acted upon by the fatiguing influence of her constrained silence. She crushed a yawn in the bud, and resisted with a super-human self-denial, the desire

she felt to give her fat arms a comfortable stretch. Still the clip of the scissors went steadily on, as though it were the ceaseless instrument in the hand of Fate for abbreviating human life; and figures were multiplied as systematically as if the royal manufacturer had been called upon to supply some extraordinary demand.

Madame Kielmansegge would have much rather paid attention to a comfortable glass of her favourite beverage, than to the comfortable specimen of her handiwork she was so busily labouring at. Mademoiselle Schulenburg kept her peace and her countenance by consoling herself with the recollection of the large sum she had made by South Sea Stock, and with the agreeable prospect that appeared before her of getting rid of her dangerous young rival.

At last, the King began to mutter to himself as he went on cutting a group of ladies out of the paper; and at the sound, his gaunt mistress was less regardful of her organs of sight than of those of hearing, whilst her stout companion was called by it to order in the very middle of an undeniable nod which she had found herself unable to resist. He gave expression to nothing but broken sentences, which his companions found it difficult to interpret; but presently they assumed a meaning that

had evidently some connexion with the object of his solicitude, which as soon as the women understood, they communicated with each other with one of those telegraphic looks they knew so well how to practise.

“ ’Twas only a dream !” he exclaimed.

Another look of secret intelligence passed between the confederates.

“ Yet ’twas awful ! I saw all as distinctly as at broad day. The Count with his gaping wounds, dropping blood. It was a damnable murder. He maintained his innocence. He swore he had been slaughtered in the dark to gratify the revenge of a worthless harlot.”

The two ladies looked wonderfully eloquent at each other.

“ Then she came with her pale face denouncing the deed, reproaching me for my injustice to her, and accusing me of cruelty, infidelity, and the worst vices that could disgrace a tyrant. She demanded back her youth, her children, her honour, her liberty, and everything most dear to her, of which I had robbed her. How her words stung ! How humbled I felt in sight of her suffering countenance ! I yearned to set her free, but dared not.”

Mademoiselle Schulenburg telegraphed her

opinion of this announcement to her faithful friend; and Madame Kielmansegge telegraphed back her own sentiments on the same important point. The King again relapsed into a silence, only disturbed by a sigh or a groan, and the unceasing click of the royal scissors. Presently on finishing a new group of ladies in well-spreading petticoats, his lack-lustre eyes were raised from his occupation, and glanced round the apartment.

“Ah, my dear friend!” he exclaimed in German, on observing the ill-favoured favourite nearest to him, “I am glad to see you; and the Kielmansegge too,” he added, observing the other, who was now wide awake. “I am glad to see the Kielmansegge.”

The two old harridans rose from their seats and made a profound reverence; then the superior in a hypocritical snuffle, made a hundred inquiries respecting the health of her royal visitor; and her fat friend in a more humble tone opened the cavity in her immense face to express inquiries equally fervent and equally sincere. Then a little social chat commenced:—the old ladies amused their lover with the gossip of the palace, sometimes opening upon subjects of deeper inte-

rest; and the old gentleman sat, and cut, and shaped, and listened with an extremely edifying air to the scandal and slip-slop so innocently retailed to him.

The recent addition to the royal family of course formed one of the subjects treated of in this snug little *coterie*; and the ceremony of the christening was dwelt upon by both ladies with much emphasis. They were well aware that the Prince had already arranged the ceremonial, and had appointed sponsors to the infant; and they now set their wits to work to induce the King to take that ceremony into his own hands, and make the appointments himself, which they asserted he was bound to do, as the sovereign and head of the family.

George I. was not at all inclined to trouble himself about the christenings of his grand-children; but as it was insisted it was absolutely necessary he should, he gave directions for the ceremony, and according to the suggestions of his advisers, appointed himself and the Duke of Newcastle as sponsors. Having proceeded so far, they knew he was so jealous of any interference with his authority, nothing would make him alter such an arrangement.

The gossip having concluded, the ladies proceeded to business ; they had sundry little favours to ask for themselves, and sundry little commissions to execute for their friends—the unassuming adjective in both instances involving gains to the amount of several thousands. They both went to work in a style that showed a vast experience in the art and science of wheedling. Having got all they could think of, they next proceeded to induce the King to grant immediate and private audiences to such of his subjects who sought to gain the King's favour through the powerful medium of the King's mistresses. This also was quickly conceded ; and in a very few minutes the gracious sovereign was granting an interview to some adventurer, whose only recommendation lay in the many bribes with which he had purchased the influence of these faded beauties.

The monarch having cut through all his paper, looked at his watch, and rose to depart. The ready Pages were at the same moment in the apartment walking backwards towards the door with the waxlights; the favourites rivalled each other in the humility of their obeisances, as the King with a slight salutation stalked out of the

apartment. The usual attendants followed, and “the May-pole,” and “the Elephant and Castle” were left to enjoyments of a very different nature to manuals of devotion and worsted knitting.

The King’s determination was soon made known to the Prince of Wales by a person particularly qualified to make the most of such a fair occasion of quarrel, and much stress was laid on so arbitrary an act as interfering with a parent’s privileges and wishes. The Prince, however, wanted little exciting. He put himself at once into a violent rage, and declaimed loudly to all who would hear him, on the intolerable tyranny of his father—swore as stoutly he would have no Duke of Newcastle, against whom it was well known he was particularly prejudiced, for godfather to his child ; and finished by giving orders for the christening of the infant, according to the previous arrangement, much earlier than any one had anticipated it could take place.

The Prince was so indignant, that instead of expressing to his wife’s beautiful attendants his awkward compliments, he did nothing but rage against the King and abuse the Duke of Newcastle. The Maids of Honour were easily enlisted into his cause, and assisted in the prepara-

tions for the approaching ceremony. The Princess was at first for delay ; but finding her husband bent on braving the royal authority she could not avoid sharing in the offence.

The day of the christening came :—it was performed in the palace in the Princess's private apartment ; and a strong muster of the Prince's friends of both sexes had been collected to do honour to the ceremony. Amongst them were the usual attendants of the Court Beauties, each pursuing his own game, and completely satisfied with the hand he held. Then there was the Duchess of Bolton rich in blunders as in brogue—a source of continual entertainment to those around her. The Duchess of Marlborough had also thought proper to attend, as she said, out of respect for the Princess ; but the Brigadier General Lepel happened also to be amongst the invited, and some of the witty rogues present were so daring as to attribute her re-appearance at Court to the attractions of her gallant lover. Nothing but the civilities of the old beau could have drawn her away from the delightful squabbles she was engaged in with Sir John Vanbrugh, the architect of Blenheim, whose services she could not be brought to recompense.

The Wits were in high feather on this grand occasion. The Duke of Wharton, Philip Dormer, Handsome Hervey, the Earl of Peterborough, the Dukes of Buckingham and Somerset—the Duke of Kingston and Lord Bellenden rivalled each other in the pungency of their remarks. Nor were the ladies of the party less brilliant. Molly Lepel was piquant, Lord Bellenden's daughter overflowing with Parisian vivacity, Sophy Howe charmingly saucy, and Mrs. Howard inexpressibly good-humoured.

The Princess sat apart, as usual, dividing her attentions between her little knot of philosophical disputants, the endless gossip of the Duke of Devonshire, and the superlative elegance of Handsome Hervey. A shade of seriousness was perceptible on her handsome countenance, but whether it was occasioned by any misgiving on account of her Consort's somewhat daring experiment, or from the mysticism of the metaphysical reasoning she had just been listening to, or from some glaring scandal in the entertaining reminiscences being poured out to her in answer to an unimportant question, is not quite clear.

The Prince, however, was evidently the most at his ease of the whole company : he rattled on with

a careless freedom to all the younger ladies, cracking jokes no one else could have ventured upon, and expressing compliments which it was equally impossible any one else would have risked. His broken English, and his boisterous laugh resounded through the apartment, and his appreciation of his own superior cleverness in outwitting his father was as excessive as it was genuine.

The Brigadier's daughter was the centre of a brilliant group of admirers, prominent among whom was the ardent and impassioned Duke of Wharton ; the assiduous and graceful Philip Dormer less publicly pursued his more able policy ; and the veteran Dukes brought all their experience to disconcert the advances of their young rivals, and secure their own. The lovely Maid of Honour had some difficulty in apportioning to each of her suitors the exact degree of attention they deserved.

The intelligence of his son's daring defiance of the royal authority had been carried to the King, and it produced such a prodigious outburst of passion, that his most confidential attendants were afraid to go near him. His Majesty was with difficulty restrained from darting in upon the Prince and his associates, and punishing them all on the spot for

their unparalleled audacity ; but he was at last induced to give up that idea, and allow his indignation to take a more dignified appearance.

In the mean time, the christening party were as gay as they could be, and the Princess's apartment resounded with the bursts of laughter that followed the brilliant sallies of the Wits at Court. The Maids of Honour had lost sight of the apprehensions they had entertained, when engaged in expediting the secret preparations for this declaration of independence, and were among the heartiest laughers, and readiest jesters present. Even Fanny Meadows allowed herself to appear amused, when the Prince addressed to her some ludicrous observation respecting the antediluvian crocodiles who had so fascinated his father.

The Duchess of Marlborough was sadly scandalized by the glaring absence of etiquette she observed in the pleasantry going on around her ; but she was so fully employed in narrating to the Princess the history of her disputes with the architect of Blenheim, that she did not allow her attention to be so much directed to the extraordinary difference in which assemblies were managed in the palace in her days, as under other circumstances it might have been.

The Duchess of Bolton in another part of the room was entertaining a select circle, among whom were Sophy Howe, and the elderly Dukes, by enacting the part of a fortune-teller, in which she displayed so much broad humour, mingled with sly allusions and shrewd guesses, as exceedingly diverted her laughing audience.

Handsome Hervey, more finished even than usual in his appearance, had excited the astonishment of many of his admirers by the extreme refinement of his language, whenever he made the exertion of uttering an observation. The ladies fully appreciated the distinction of being addressed by him. Mary Lepel, however, regarded him with more curiosity than interest. She knew his fame, and was not inattentive to his presence, but failed to exhibit that eagerness to obtain his notice which some of her companions so frequently displayed. Perhaps it was this indifference that caused the Exquisite to approach her, and then detained him in her neighbourhood. He listened to her enthusiastic account of the heroic deeds of Prince Oroondates, which she was detailing to the attentive Philip Dormer ; and though he doubted the possibility as well as the propriety of any well bred gentleman enduring such prodigious fatigue,

to gain his mistress, as that hero underwent before he obtained the incomparable Statira, he felt that such praise as breathed from those eloquent lips ought to be a sufficient inducement for a man of the most refined breeding to attempt even to rival Hercules in his labours.

Every member of this gay assembly was fully occupied, and seemed as completely happy as it was possible for a courtier to be, when in the midst of the general enjoyment the folding doors of the apartment suddenly opened, and the Groom of the Chambers announced "Count Bernstorff." An electric shock could not have produced a more startling effect upon the company than the appearance amongst them of the hang-dog countenance of this generally detested doer of dirty work to the King.

He advanced with a cringing bow, and a fawning smile; yet an air of affected concern made itself visible upon his countenance, which boded the pleasant party no good. There was a dead silence. All seemed to dread something, yet knew not the nature of the danger. The man's presence among them produced much the same effect as the discovery of a hawk in a dove-cot. The Duchess of Marlborough began to think she had

not been sufficiently discreet in accepting the invitation of the Princess.

“Well, rascal!” shouted the Prince in German, “what ill wind blew thee to a place where thy discreditable company is so unwelcome?” If there was one of his father’s counsellors his son particularly detested, it was his unexpected visitor; and good reason he had for his detestation.

“I feel deeply grieved, your Royal Highness, to be the bearer of ill-tidings—” commenced the Count in a whining voice.

“Hold thy accursed croaking, thou filthy carrion-crow, and at once explain the cause of this intrusion,” exclaimed the Prince.

“And am no less concerned at having fallen under your Royal Highness’s displeasure,” added the intruder with a more cringing bow, and a more apologetic whine.

The irritated Prince advanced two steps, no doubt with the intention of kicking the fellow out of the room; but he checked himself. “Go on, rascal, finish and begone!” he cried.

“I am honoured by his Majesty’s commands,” continued the Count, a gleam of spite shewing itself in the fear his chalky countenance expressed, “I am honoured by his Majesty’s commands,” he falteringly repeated, “to inform your Royal High-

ness that you are to consider yourself under arrest."

The face of the Prince became purple with passion; he would have dashed at the trembling craven before him, and driven his head through the door. At this critical moment he felt a hand upon his arm—it was that of the Princess. Dismay, affright, and indignation were in the faces of all the company; but the Princess, as soon as she became aware of the errand of Count Bernstorff, had glided towards her husband; and by a touch and a look checked the burst of passion that might have led to mischief, both to himself and the Count.

"You must surrender your sword, my love, to the King's messenger," said her Royal Highness, in a low voice.

"My sword!" thundered the Prince, "my good sword is not to be polluted by the touch of such a traitor!"

Lord Peterborough urged the necessity of obedience to such a mandate; the Dukes of Somerset, Buckingham, and Kingston used the same argument; and the Princess implored her husband, with a touching earnestness he soon found it impossible to resist, not to forget his own dignity.

"Here, Philip Dormer!" he cried at last in

French, as he unsheathed his sword, "take this weapon to yonder ill looking hound; if the King had sent his shoe-black on such an errand, I should not have thought so much of the disgrace; but let what may follow of this outrage upon the heir apparent of the British throne, take care that it never passes from that rascal's dirty hands into mine."

The Prince gave one withering look towards the trembling minister of his father, and then turned his back upon him. Philip Dormer took the weapon with an appearance of great devotion, and walked from his enraged master to the place where Count Bernstorff stood waiting to receive it, as if with a full sense of the importance of the charge. He was conscious that the eyes of all except the Prince were upon him, waiting in anxiety and alarm the conclusion of the strange scene.

Count Bernstorff was not ill pleased in having the opportunity of humbling the son of his sovereign, though in no small alarm at the prospect he had had of a severe and signal punishment for his manifold treacheries. Still he was in a state of considerable apprehension, partly occasioned by the severe shock he had lately received from the

dreaded band whose outrages had so alarmed the town; and partly from the fright the Prince's violence had thrown him into. Little did he think that the leaders of that terrible gang, who had so dreadfully punished him, were almost at his elbow.

Philip Dormer had approached close to the King's messenger, when as if by accident, he let the sword drop at the Count's feet. The clatter of the steel disturbed the timid man extremely; but anxious to conclude his unpleasant duty and remove himself to safer quarters, he officiously stooped down to recover the weapon. At that moment, the Earl of Peterborough, who never was known to miss an opportunity of playing a trick, let the place be where it might, suddenly raised the alarming cry of "Mohocks!"

"Mohocks!" echoed the Duke of Wharton, in the same humour.

"A sweat, a sweat!" shouted the Dukes of Buckingham and Somerset.

Inexpressibly bewildered, astonished, and frightened by these ominous sounds, into the conviction that he was again about to suffer the torment he had so lately experienced, the Count without stopping to pick up the weapon, turned

to the door, opened it and rushed out, upsetting two of the yeomen of the guard stationed in the antechamber.

The alarm of the christening party changed at once to mirth, and some of the more reckless of the wits resumed their pleasant jests and gossipings, as if nothing had occurred to disturb their entertainment; but there were others who looked grave, and anticipated more decisive measures. The King, however, in a few hours thought proper to withdraw the arrest; but he sent an order for the Prince with his family and attendants to quit the palace, appointing Leicester House, a large mansion in Leicester Fields for his residence.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DARING ABDUCTION.

Old Orpheus, that husband so civil,
He followed his wife down to hell;
And who would not go to the devil
For the sake of dear Molly Lepel.

LORD CHESTERFIELD.

GREAT confusion existed at Leicester House, within a few weeks of the removal of the Prince of Wales from the palace. It is true that great confusion had existed there ever since the heir apparent had made it his residence. The angry King and his angry son were in a state of open warfare; the former to mark his hostility refusing to allow any person to appear at Court, who was known to visit the Prince; and the latter in bravado, giving out that disreputable characters, however well known at St. James's, would not be allowed admission to Leicester House.

Notwithstanding this disgrace, the Prince and Princess had many staunch friends, and a very respectable independent Court they made. The Duchess of Marlborough, secretly delighting in the squabble, gave the Princess the benefit of her counsel, mingled however with a circumstantial relation of her disputes respecting the building of Blenheim, and a liberal quantity of abuse of every one who displeased her. The Duchess of Bolton brought her good humour, and an exhaustless stock of blunders. Ladies of quality went to Leicester House to shew their spirit, and then exhibited themselves at St. James's, despite the royal mandate. Indeed so many ladies of distinction visited the Princess, that it was fully expected the King would shortly be abandoned to the society of his ugly mistresses.

The Duke of Kingston was amongst the discreet few, who thought it prudent to quit the son for the father; but the Duke of Wharton, the Earl of Peterborough, Philip Dormer, Handsome Herve, Colonel Argyle, Anthony Lowther and one or two more, were zealous and staunch in the Prince's service, and their many brilliant remarks on the existing state of things formed a continual fund of amusement to the town.

The Princess soon returned to her wonted

dignity, and philosophical pursuits; but there was an additional graciousness in her demeanour, which won her Royal Highness the most favourable opinions from the sort of scientific Noah's Ark she contrived to gather around her. She entertained scholars of every description, and to all appearance took a vast interest in their labours. She held levees for the reception of poets, chemists, astronomers, divines, metaphysicians, painters, and other learned characters; and appeared to be as abstruse and unintelligible as the best of them.

In short, the Princess was establishing a Court of a very superior kind to the one from which she had been banished; but scarcely had the confusion consequent on the unceremonious removal of her family from St. James's abated, when she received a blow that affected her still more deeply, though she had scarcely any connection with the affair. This affair it was that had produced the confusion alluded to at the commencement of the chapter.

It had been discovered that "Molly Lepel," as she had for sometime been familiarly styled by all the men of fashion; the favourite of the Court, the toast of the town, the matchless beauty who had drawn around her so many noble admirers, had in some

clandestine manner not very clearly explained, withdrawn herself from Leicester House. She had gone scarcely any one knew how, and no one knew where.

All that could be ascertained of this mysterious business amounted to this: that a letter had come to her from Petersham Manor, stating that the Brigadier had sent John Coachman with the chariot and her black page Pompey for her to return home for a day or two, her presence being urgently required by her father. The Princess had approved of her visit, and after taking leave of her young schoolfellows she had stepped into her chariot which had immediately driven away.

On the same day John Coachman and the black page had returned to Petersham Manor on foot, without the chariot, and the story they told was, that while the horses were being refreshed at the usual baiting place at Hammersmith, they had gone into the public house to obtain a little refreshment for themselves. That they were not absent five minutes taking a mug of ale with a fair portion of bread and cheese, yet on returning to the door they found the chariot gone; and Boots and the Ostler swore point blank that they had seen the said John Coachman and the said

Pompey, the black page, get up on their usual places upon the chariot almost immediately they had entered the house, and that the chariot was driven away at a brisk pace. All efforts to trace the vehicle had proved ineffectual, till the next day when the empty carriage and horses were brought to Petersham Manor by a countryman, who had discovered them abandoned in a byelane near Richmond, and recognising the horses, had driven them home.

The Brigadier was beside himself: nothing could be heard of his lost daughter. He sent messengers in every direction, he instituted the most searching inquiries, he offered large rewards; but he did not succeed in gaining the slightest intelligence. The chariot appeared to have disappeared from the road-side inn as if by magic, and no one had subsequently seen the vehicle till its discovery, or the young lady who rode in it.

At Leicester House there were different opinions respecting the extraordinary disappearance of the fascinating Maid of Honour. Her school-fellows were much concerned—Mary Bellenden particularly. She feared that her young friend had been robbed and murdered; for some very daring outrages had lately been committed on that road.

The Duke of Wharton was satisfied the young lady had been carried off either by the Duke of Buckingham or the Duke of Somerset ; and these two noble rivals were as firmly convinced, that their illustrious President had in his usual daring manner anticipated their design of possessing themselves of that tempting prize. Each lost not a moment in setting his agents at work to watch his rivals, and Captain Spatterdash and Bully Swag, with Jack Wildair, Dick Rumpus, and Tom Pepper were speedily retained to search for the missing lady's hiding place.

Philip Dormer was at first inclined to suspect the Prince ; but his anxiety on learning the mysterious disappearance of the Brigadier's daughter was too genuine to allow of such a suspicion. His Royal Highness inclined to the belief that a forcible abduction had taken place—such crimes being of common occurrence ; but he was at a loss to fix upon the guilty party, his suspicions wavering between the Duke of Wharton and the Earl of Peterborough, both noblemen being in the enjoyment of a vast reputation for gallantry ; but they declared their ignorance of the transaction in such forcible terms that the Prince was constrained to believe them.

As soon as the news became known at St. James's, the most extraordinary stories began to be circulated by the royal mistresses respecting the missing Maid of Honour, very prejudicial to her reputation. It was confidently reported that the whole proceeding was nothing more than a planned elopement, and it was stated that "the creature," notwithstanding her youth and apparent innocence, was old in intrigue, and had always been ready to run off with the first man who offered. The King was told a number of scandalous stories concerning her; but he seemed to take little interest in them, and to look on the occurrence of her flight with a strange and melancholy interest.

The whole town soon became aware of this startling occurrence, and so much attention did it excite, that the last rise of South Sea Stock did not create so many wonderers. There was no end to the rumours in circulation, each succeeding one more extravagant and romantic than the rest; but notwithstanding all that was said and a great deal that was done, the mystery could not be cleared up—the disappearance could not be accounted for.

Whilst this nine days' wonder was talked of

everywhere, between the Folly and the Hercules' Tavern, and from Hockley-in-the-Hole to Jenny's Whim; whilst it was being discussed at chocolate-houses, debated at play-houses, canvassed at puppet-shows, and debated upon at the new Exchange, we have left the heroine of it without giving any explanation of her strange adventure. It is necessary that we inform the reader that our fair favourite left Leicester House in high spirits; at peace with herself and with all mankind, and with all womankind also, excepting the particularly ugly specimens she had been taught to regard as the Princess's enemies.

After a little affable gossip with John Coachman, and a kind word or two to Pompey, she stepped into the chariot, and commenced her homeward journey. As she proceeded, she had a favourable opportunity for reflection; and she employed it in thinking over the pleasant life she had lately been leading, and the pleasant things that had lately been said to her. And she laughed over the tender attentions of her old beaux, and thought over the more agreeable gallantries of her young ones; comparing them with that illustrious Prince whose perfections had made so decided an impression on her imagination.

There was a sort of dashing spirit in the bear-

ing of the profligate young Duke of Wharton that made him a dangerous companion to a young girl so unsuspecting and unworldly as Mary Leipel. His position and his celebrity, bad as it undoubtedly was, were likely in those days to exercise a powerful influence over her. His talents too were by no means insignificant, though sadly abused. His profligacy was notorious; but he had the art to hide his vices from the observation of the object of his adoration; and she, with her romantic disposition, could see in him nothing but the ardent lover—a lover, too, who had all the brilliant qualifications of many of her favourite heroes.

Next to him came that most finished courtier and admirable wit, Philip Dormer. If his devotions were not so ardent, they were infinitely better expressed. Philip Dormer studied the graces both in speech and in conduct, and he took great pains to show the world how well he had got his lesson. Our Maid of Honour was as little likely to observe how extremely superficial were all these recommendations, as she was to discover through the showy exterior of his more distinguished rival, the hollowness of heart it concealed.

If the Brigadier's daughter honoured Hand-

some Hervey with a thought, it was accompanied with a considerable degree of ridicule. That superlatively fine gentleman amused her exceedingly : she laughed at his elaborate elegance, she laughed at his eccentric remarks, she laughed at all the extravagances and affectations he chose to indulge in. There was no fear of her affections being engaged in that quarter. She could not assimilate Handsome Hervey with any hero of her acquaintance ; and unless there was sufficient of the heroic in the character of the man who presented himself before her as her lover, to satisfy her romantic disposition, he had not the shadow of a chance of obtaining her. No two persons she thought could be more unlike than the brave Prince Oroondates and the effeminate Lord John Hervey.

The Earl of Peterborough would have had by far the most likely chance to succeed amongst these competitors had he been somewhat younger, a little less of a skeleton, and possessed some pretensions to good looks. He was a hero, and, with all his eccentricities, a hero a woman might be proud of. But Handsome Hervey, in her estimation, was as complete a contrast to men of the material such heroes are made, as an Italian

greyhound is to an English mastiff. One was remarkable for the most studied elegance, the other for as singular an indifference to the most ordinary attention to appearances. Even Philip Dormer was not thought to come close enough to her romantic standard, which the reckless nature of the young Duke approached much more nearly.

As for her ancient admirers, their gallantries were tolerated for the amusement they afforded. They were regarded as the pantaloons of the comedy of life going on around her; and the tenderness of the asthmatic Duke of Somerset and the pleasantries of the gouty Duke of Buckingham, were but considered as legitimate provocations for as much innocent mirth as herself and her fair schoolfellows could make out of them.

Mary Lepel was pleasantly passing these personages in review before her, when the chariot stopped, and she noticed John Coachman and Pompey enter the inn. Her attention was attracted by some gipsys on the other side of the road, one of whom came to the coach-window and offered to tell her her fortune. While thus engaged, she was surprised at finding the carriage moving onward, and that John Coachman had so quickly returned to his seat on the box.

She threw herself back in her seat, shut her eyes, and for some minutes indulged herself in one of those day dreams so delightful to romantic young ladies of seventeen. There was a good deal of pleasant retrospection mixed up with it. A delightful reference to the formal propriety of her proceedings under the severe eye of the peerless Penelope Stiffandstern, and a most agreeable contrast with her back-board and sampler experiences of that date, with her honourable position as Maid of Honour to her amiable Princess.

Having sufficiently indulged herself with these reminiscences, it occurred to the Brigadier's daughter that she must be approaching Richmond, and she kept a look-out for a refreshing glimpse of the beauties of that charming neighbourhood. To her great surprise she could not recognize a single feature of the scenery on each side of her. She continued to gaze now at one window and now at the other, but she beheld nothing familiar to her from either. She could not understand it. There must have been extraordinary alterations made since she drove down that road last. Every place appeared different. Having puzzled herself to no purpose in thinking

why this should be, she came to the conclusion that for some reason or other John Coachman had determined on going home by another road, with which she was unacquainted. But if it was a new road, she discovered that it was not a shorter one, for on referring to her watch she saw that she ought to have arrived at Petersham, though she was quite sure she was not near it.

Her surprise now began to assume somewhat of consternation, for she fancied that John Coachman must have made some mistake, and was going a wrong road; and with this impression she let down the glass and called to him to ask the reason of his taking her such a strange direction. But it appeared evident that the man was so absorbed in his occupation, or else had become so extremely deaf that he could not hear her, for after calling and bawling till she had become hoarse, not the slightest notice was taken of her by the ever attentive functionary on the coach box.

She was extremely puzzled as well as annoyed, and she could not help feeling deeply troubled. The time had passed when she ought to have been at home, and yet although the horses were proceeding at a brisk pace, they certainly were

not approaching their destination. What gave her most concern was the difficulty she met with in attracting the attention of John Coachman. At other times the slightest word from her would have brought him to an immediate halt. It was inexplicable. If she had not seen him sitting before her as she did, in her father's livery, she would have doubted his being there.

Her embarrassment and anxiety were every minute becoming more intense, and as the chariot entered into a gloomy lane almost canopied with the overarching trees on both banks, she made one more desperate effort to arouse the inattentive charioteer. She managed to put her head out of the glass in front of the chariot, and reached the driver's arm, which she pulled so vigorously that the man turned his face round. With a shriek she fell back against the seat. It was not John Coachman.

Poor Mary Lepel was in a prodigious state of affright. She could not make it out at all. How this stranger had taken the place of her father's old domestic she was unable to imagine; and this silent drive in a different direction to her home, by a person she had never seen before, appeared as mysterious as it was alarming. What could

she do in a lonely place by herself in the hands of persons who must have got rid of her faithful servants by violent means, and no doubt intended by efforts equally criminal to get rid of her? What was their object: robbery or murder?

While vainly endeavouring to satisfy herself as to the intentions of the party who had thus taken possession of her, the chariot stopped. The door opened, a man jumped in, and before the Brigadier's daughter could so far get the better of her fright to say or do anything, she found her head enveloped in a cloak, and herself borne out of the carriage. All she could next understand was that she was immediately lifted into the arms of a horseman, who placed her securely before him, and then started off at a great pace.

In her alarm she must have fainted, for on her recovering consciousness she found herself on a couch in a small but well furnished room, with no other companion than an old woman in a dark serge dress. Her wrinkled physiognomy seemed like a piece of parchment suddenly shrivelled up by application to the fire, and her long white eye-brows and lashes, her gray hair clubbed on the top of her head, her keen hawk-like eye, sharp nose, and puckered mouth were not calculated to excite confidence.

But to a female, the presence of another in a moment of trial, of difficulty, or of danger, is a great consolation. Mary Lepel so considered it, and seemed resolved to make the most of the circumstance for she immediately rushed to her, fell on her knees, and taking hold of her hand, made an earnest appeal to save her from the perils by which she seemed to be surrounded. The woman in reply merely shook her head, and disengaging herself from the humble and trembling Maid of Honour, suddenly quitted the room.

Left to her own reflections, which were as bewildering as they were terrifying, the Brigadier's daughter appeared in a sort of stupor of despair. She thought over the whole of the strange scene in which she had been made to enact a part, and wondered the more, the more she thought of it. What could be the object of taking her away? Who could be the person by whose orders the abduction had been accomplished? Were questions she continually asked herself; and of course in the state of alarm in which she was, she could obtain no satisfactory answer.

She looked round the room. The furniture was of an old fashion; consisting of heavy carved chairs, with tall backs and handsome tapestry

cushions, and oak tables nearly black with age. Handsome mirrors were fixed on the walls, together with two or three pleasing pictures apparently of considerable value.

When Mary Lepel had somewhat recovered her composure, the old woman again entered, and in silence presented her with a letter. Though surprised to find a communication directed to her under such circumstances, she did not lose much time in breaking the seal; but her astonishment was prodigiously increased when she read in French the following sentences.

“Adorable Creature,

“I shall not disturb you till you have somewhat recovered from the fatigues of your hasty journey. Assure yourself of your safety, and take the rest you require. Your present ancient attendant will see to your accommodation; but it will be useless your appealing to her, or expecting her advice, as she has the double misfortune of being both deaf and dumb.

“I wait impatiently for the hour I can show myself, and implore your pardon. Till then I throw myself on your charity, remaining the most ardent of lovers and unfortunate of men.

“AMYNTOR.”

“How wonderful!” thought the Brigadier’s daughter. It was indeed very singular. How little had she imagined, when leaving the kind Princess in the morning, that before the close of the day she should have become a prisoner in the dwelling of this mysterious admirer. Who was Amyntor? Why was he the most unfortunate of men? What sort of a person was he: tall or short, fair or brown? That he was a stranger she could scarcely entertain a doubt, for upon due consideration she could not fix upon either of her admirers as likely to have gained possession of her by the stratagem which he had so successfully employed.

The communication, singular as it was, exercised a most tranquillizing effect upon the troubled spirits of the fair captive. She appeared more reconciled to the accident that had happened to her, and regarded her deaf and dumb associate with less repulsiveness than at first she could not avoid betraying. She even, upon some refreshment being brought in by her, sat down and partook of it. She could not, however, avoid thinking of the alarm her flight might occasion to her father, and the wonder and speculation the report of it would be sure to create at Leicester House.

So passed the time till the hour of rest had nearly arrived, by which period she had so well considered the whole of the extraordinary adventure in which she was involved, that she extremely condemned her own pusillanimity. She considered that she ought not to have allowed herself so easily to have fallen into the power of the person, whoever he was, who had brought her to her present abode. And moreover she recollected that it was not by faintings and such feminine weaknesses that her favourite heroines had achieved their adventures.

Statira would have been ashamed of such folly; Clelia would have known better than so easily to have been made a dupe; Cleopatra would have released herself as soon as she discovered the trick that had been played upon her; and Chariclea was not likely to have suffered such an outrage upon her to be committed with impunity. Mary Lepel considered she ought better to have supported her own dignity; and resolved not to allow any unheroic weakness to overpower her for the future.

With these good resolves she allowed herself to be shown to an adjoining chamber very comfortably fitted up as a bed-room, where after dis-

missing her attendant, she looked to the fastenings of the door ; and having as she believed secured herself against intrusion, undressed herself, said her prayers, and went to bed.

CHAPTER IX.

THE VELVET MASK.

Of all the bright beauties so killing,
In London's fair city that dwell,
None can give me such joy were she willing,
As the beautiful Molly Lepel.

LORD CHESTERFIELD.

NEXT morning, scarcely had the young captive breakfasted, and her silent attendant retired, when the door again opened, and there entered a gentleman a little below the medium height, very handsomely dressed in a suit of Mazarine velvet. He made a profound bow as he closed the door behind him; and Mary Lepel, a little disturbed by his appearance, was more so when she discovered that his features were concealed by a mask of the same material as his dress. She however recovered her composure, before the stranger ap-

peared to have concluded a series of more humble than graceful genuflections, with which he advanced towards her.

The Brigadier's daughter did not think proper to rise from her seat. She had thought a good deal upon her position, and had determined to let Mr. Amyntor, however unfortunate he might think himself, know that he had done a most unpardonable thing in depriving her of her liberty; and that she insisted on being restored to her friends.

"I come to implore your pardon, incomparable creature!" exclaimed the gentleman in the velvet mask, in very good French, "for the little violence I have been obliged to use in obtaining the gratification I now enjoy of having a beauty of such ravishing attractions under my roof."

"Sir!" exclaimed the youthful Maid of Honour, with a dignity extremely becoming in so determined a heroine, "I am astonished at your presumption. Permit me, Sir, to say that I have been taken away from my friends by a trick unworthy a man of honour. I beg, Sir, you will have the goodness to make this interview as short as possible, and without the least delay, provide me with the means of reaching my father's house."

Notwithstanding that our heroine spoke with such firm dignity, she was in a terrible fright, and found her heart beating much too rapidly to be pleasant.

“I would outstrip the wind to do your bidding, divinest of your sex,” replied the stranger, obsequiously; “but unfortunately, at present, I have it not in my power to oblige you in the manner you wish. Every attention shall be paid you whilst you honour this place with your presence; you may rely on the enjoyment of every comfort, and the possession of every gratification. Be assured, that I shall be too happy to contribute all the means at my disposal to secure the happiness of so ravishing a creature.”

“Sir, you are trifling with me,” answered the Brigadier’s daughter. “I am not here by any wish of mine, nor is it my wish to remain. If you are not disposed to act towards me as a man of honour, by expediting my return to my father’s house, I beg you will not intrude upon me any longer.”

“Fairest creature, suffer one who has long worshipped your unrivalled perfections—” commenced the stranger, approaching his fair companion more closely.

“Begone, Sir !” she exclaimed, starting up from her seat with a particularly indignant look ; “your language, in the position in which I am placed, is as little creditable for you to utter, as for me to hear.”

She then quietly walked away to the other end of the room, leaving the gentleman in the velvet mask in no small degree disconcerted by the spirited manner in which she had expressed herself. He was also a little irritated. He had anticipated a different scene with his beautiful captive, whose extreme youth and utter helplessness he expected would have influenced her to behave very differently. He paused a few minutes ; but as the young lady took no further notice of him, he became more exasperated. He strode after her with violent strides, and seized her by the arm.

“Zounds, Madam, this tone must be altered !” he cried, in a sharp and angry voice ; “you forget you are completely in the power of one who never suffered himself to be trifled with.”

“Sir, I neither know nor care who you are,” replied the Maid of Honour, very proudly, as she disengaged her arm from his grasp ; “it is misfortune enough for me to be aware that I have fallen into the hands of one who is so lost to every

sentiment of honour, as, after basely entrapping a defenceless female, to offer her a gross insult, when there was no one near from whom she could claim protection."

"S'death, Madam! Beware how you provoke me!" shouted he, with a menacing gesture. "For less than this, creatures as fair as yourself have been punished in a manner to make life both a burthen and a disgrace."

The Brigadier's daughter remained silent; her heart beat fast, and her cheek was paler than usual: but such a Roxana-like spirit beamed forth from those beautiful eyes as made her companion hesitate.

"When, Sir, may I ask, is this unwarrantable detention to cease?" she at last demanded, looking at him as if to pierce the velvet mask to the troubled features beneath.

"That depends on yourself, fair lady," replied the gentleman in more courteous tones. "Were I to fulfil the intentions with which you have been placed in my hands, your return home would not only be uncertain, but your safety equally so. Nevertheless I am willing to make your imprisonment as short and as light as possible, provided you are sufficiently complaisant in your behaviour

to one who has long worshipped you, though in secret."

"I cannot but suppose, Sir, you are labouring under some error respecting the identity of the person you are addressing," said Mary Lepel, coldly. "I am the daughter of Brigadier General Lepel, and a Maid of Honour to her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales."

Saying this, the Brigadier's daughter gracefully glided past him; and before he could recover from his surprise, she had entered her bedroom, and locked herself in. The stranger made two or three hearty execrations, and then slowly quitted the apartment.

Mary Lepel was now left to her own reflections, and they did not happen to be the most consolatory. She had not discovered who was the individual into whose power she had fallen; but by the careful manner in which he concealed his features, it was very possible he was some one of consequence. There could be little doubt she had been kidnapped for some abominable purpose; and from what the gentleman in the velvet mask had allowed to escape him, it appeared as if there were other parties to the transaction.

She shuddered as she thought of the fate that

might overtake her while so completely in the power of the hardened and desperate wretches, as she doubted not they were, who had combined to deprive her of her liberty. But she would not suffer herself to be disheartened. The matter looked bad enough, for she felt convinced she had greatly incensed her captor by her proud carriage towards him ; nevertheless, she was as certain that had Cassandra, or any other of her favourites been placed in the same position, she could not have conducted herself more heroically than she had done. With this consoling conviction her spirit rose, and she determined to gain her liberty, if there existed any possibility of achieving it.

At the summons of her attendant she returned to the room. She now paid particular attention to the old woman's movements ; and saw, or fancied she saw, that she had become the object of stricter attention. A suspicious expression lurked in her cat-like eyes, and she rarely left the apartment. Her look too was more forbidding, more hag-like than before ; and altogether she appeared as undesirable a companion as a youthful beauty could meet with. But revolting as she was, and unsocial as her infirmity made her, Mary Lepel regarded her as a protection.

She was a woman though a most unfeminine specimen of her sex; and the youthful Maid of Honour felt in her society a degree of safety which she could not have experienced had she been left alone.

It was a tantalising thing in her opinion to be placed with a person so incapable of anything like social communication, when she was so extremely anxious to obtain a little knowledge that might enable her to shape her course with safety. The Brigadier's daughter, however, bore the deprivation of conversation with as much philosophy as might be expected from a young lady of such heroic tendencies

The dinner had been enjoyed with a tolerable appetite; for the poor captive thought it most advisable to appear as nearly reconciled as possible to the position in which she had been placed. She thought that if she could lull suspicion, facilities for escape would be much more likely to be afforded her, than if she fretted, or became restless and troublesome.

The time, however, hung very heavily on her hands; and she could not avoid occasionally feeling extremely uncomfortable. Towards the close of the day her silent attendant left the room,

and in another minute the gentleman in the velvet mask entered it. It was easy to perceive that he was very far from sharing the dullness of his prisoner. He entered singing the burthen of a French song; and with little ceremony took a chair, and placed it by her side. A close observer might have noticed that he was exceedingly awkward, and very unsteady in his movements. He had considerable difficulty in getting the chair in the desired position, and very nearly placed it on the young lady's toes.

She took no notice of him. Still he kept sidling up to her, going round her with his chair, and peering impudently into her face as in a husky voice he continued his unmelodious singing. At last he sat himself by her side, and crossing his legs stared her full in the face for several seconds.

"I hope Mademoiselle is in a better humour," he said. "I am monstrously concerned to see so admirable a beauty endeavouring all she can to spoil her attractions by looking cross and proud. Venus never frowns. There is nothing that spoils the face so much. Curse me, if I don't think there ought to be a law to prevent a pretty woman doing her beauty so much injury. We must understand one another, child. I have you fast;

and thank the gods for the good fortune that has procured me so matchless an acquisition. It is impossible your retreat should be discovered. Here you remain, till arrangements are made for placing you in a position infinitely less agreeable.

“I have been chosen as an agent to transport you to a place where you must become very much less troublesome than some, who are not your friends, think you are likely to be, should they suffer you to remain at the Court of his Britannic Majesty; and I must needs acknowledge, if ever a pretty woman could push aside all rivals, you are the person. They thought, poor fools! I hated you as much as they did. They made a great mistake, Mademoiselle, I assure you. I love you prodigiously. I swear to you I never saw a woman so much to my fancy. I am quite ravished when I look at that exquisite face. ’Tis fair enough to bring about another Trojan war.”

Mary Lepel listened attentively and in perfect silence to her companion’s volubility. She sat upright in an attitude which would have commanded the admiration of that unrivalled teacher of deportment, the peerless Penelope Stiffandstern. Not a muscle moved, not a word escaped her.

“Your enemies are powerful, Mademoiselle,” continued the gentleman; “they have succeeded in making their vengeance felt by persons of far greater consequence than yourself; and that vengeance has been terrible, though excited by what may be thought as little cause as you have given.

“Your position is indeed full of danger. You are a dove in the claws of a hawk, or rather of a brood of hawks. I alone can save you. I *will* save you, Mademoiselle. You shall not pine away your life in a distant prison, like another of their victims I could name; or be sold to the plantations as a female slave, which one proposed doing with you; or shut up in a mad-house, according to the desire of another. You shall be as happy as a little queen, and you shall make me happy; eh Mademoiselle?”

Mary Lepel shuddered as she heard the doom that had been designed her by the terrible enemies she had made; but her courage did not forsake her.

“Sir,” she replied, withdrawing the hand her companion had attempted to take, “I cannot but think you are in some prodigious error, as to what you have stated regarding certain persons unknown, to whom you allude as my enemies. T4

the best of my belief, I have no enemies. I have done nothing to excite enmity; I have never injured any one by word, thought, or deed."

"Mademoiselle, it is your beauty that hath done you so much mischief," answered the gentleman in the velvet mask; and then in a more impassioned manner added, as he sought to place his arm round her waist, "it is your beauty that must free you from its fatal consequences."

"Unhand me, sirrah!" she exclaimed, her eyes flashing with indignation, as she endeavoured to free herself from his embrace. "Your tale I cannot doubt is a fabrication. Your conduct sufficiently proves to me how unworthy you are of the slightest confidence."

"Nay, my charmer! I swear to you I have stated nothing but the truth," added her companion, drawing her graceful figure towards him; "and I will take the oath on those rosy lips."

"Villain! you shall dearly repent this insult!" cried the Brigadier's daughter, struggling with all her power to elude the threatened caress. Her strength, however, was insufficient for her defence. She had to combat against a man equally inflamed with wine and lust, who had determined on the infamous course he meant to adopt. She

writhed in his arms, and shrieked, and did all in her power to escape from his grasp; but all seemed likely to be unavailing. An accident, however, saved her. In the struggle the velvet mask fell off, and she had now no difficulty in recognising the unprepossessing features of the King's Hanoverian favourite, Baron Bothmar.

The Baron, disconcerted at this discovery, loosened his hold, and his fair companion immediately took advantage of it, to release herself from his embrace.

"Is this the way, Baron Bothmar," she demanded with dignity, "you act towards the helpless subjects of the sovereign whose favour you possess? The consequences of the outrage you have dared to commit may be less easily evaded than you imagine. I insist upon your Lordship immediately restoring me to my father, who will take care to exact from you a strict account of the atrocious insult you have offered his daughter."

The face of the Baron was distorted with rage, whilst confusion kept him dumb. What reasons he had for concealment did not transpire; but it is easy to believe that they were important ones, or he would not have felt so completely overwhelmed by the accident that had discovered him,

notwithstanding the care he had taken to preserve his incognito. He at last found words with which to express himself.

“You know me then, Madam Lepel?” he at last muttered, pretty well sobered by a consideration for the results of this adventure, should the young lady make her friends acquainted with it. This, however, he determined to prevent at all hazards. “I am afraid the discovery will be more disastrous to you than to myself. It forces me into a decisive line of conduct. I will give you time for consideration. In four and twenty hours expect my return; and if the same pride and obstinacy influence you, to the extent they have already done, your doom will be sealed. Take warning. Accept the good offices of a friend, whilst he has it in his power to serve you.”

So saying the Baron Bothmar made his captive a low bow, and marched out of the room, in as complete a state of embarrassment as it was possible for a Hanoverian nobleman to get into. The Brigadier's daughter recognised the courteous movement of the discomfited Baron, with the very slightest inclination of her pretty head; and saw the door closed upon him with a degree of satisfaction she could hardly bring herself to acknow-

ledge. She had now time to think over the strangeness of the whole adventure ; and the pretended revelations she had just heard. She could scarcely give credit to them ; but though strange, they were not impossible. She had been warned of the Hanoverians, both by the Prince and Princess, and was now ready enough to believe that they might have been led by jealousy or hatred to mark her out for destruction. Could her voice have reached Leicester House, she doubted not that amongst her numerous admirers it would quickly raise for her a champion as valiant as Prince Oroondates ; and, according to her ideas, never had a distressed lady greater occasion for the interposition of such a hero.

Mary Lepel was not disturbed any more that day. Her silent attendant came and went, fetched and carried, scrutinized her closely, and watched her movements with cat-like vigilance ; but though her uneasiness had greatly increased, the prisoner contrived to get through the day with tolerable quietude ; and having taken the same precautions as on the previous night, she said her prayers, and resigned herself to sleep with more composure than might have been anticipated.

In the morning of the third day of her abduc-

tion the young heroine rose, greatly refreshed. Anxious and uneasy, she certainly was; but she had communed with her own heart, and in consequence her spirit had become more capable of meeting the difficulties of her position. She had looked into the adventure thoroughly, and saw, or fancied she saw, why so much mystery had been displayed; why her attendant had been chosen deprived of all use of the two principal senses; why the velvet mask had been adopted; and why the Baron had always chosen to converse in French.

She looked out of the window, and saw close to a well-made gravel walk a box tree cut in the form of the Queen of Sheba, whilst at a little distance was a similar effigy of King Solomon. A garden therefore lay in that direction, from which it did not seem possible to escape, for a high wall encompassed it.

The morning meal was passed, and the old woman left her to her own reflections, till the Baron made his appearance. But a little time had elapsed before the Brigadier's daughter took it into her head to try the door of her room. It was not fastened. She opened it, which she had never attempted to do before. She stood and

listened for some time ; but all seemed as quiet as if the dwelling had no inhabitant but herself. She thought she would reconnoitre ; and noiselessly crept down stairs to the next landing. She fancied she could then hear voices. A door was partly open close to her, and after a moment's pause she glided into the chamber to which it led.

The persons conversing were evidently in an inner room, the door of which was also partly open ; and fancying she heard her own name mentioned, Mary Lepel crept noiselessly along through a spacious apartment, comfortably furnished, and ventured to peep through the door by the side of the hinges, where she could see what was going on, without being visible from within. The first object her eye fell upon was the gaunt figure of Mademoiselle Schulenburg. The powerful favourite was standing up talking in an angry voice, with violent gesticulations, to Madame Kielmansegge, whose ample proportions filled an arm-chair, near a table where glasses, bottles, and a plate of cakes were seen. Both ladies looked fierce and dissatisfied. The nose of the one was warmly tinged, as from the effects of a strong dose of Schiedam. The nose of the

other was thin and blue. Baron Bothmar was at a little distance, listening to their communications.

Now it so happened that Mary Lepel, though she readily recognised the persons of every member of this worthy trio, and could every now and then hear her name mentioned, could only guess at the subject of their discourse; for they spoke in German—a language with which unfortunately she was totally unacquainted. We must therefore explain that the ladies were acquainting the gentleman with the great success they had had with the King in all their recent proceedings; that they had so fomented the quarrel between him and his son, that a proposal had even been made and considered by his Majesty to kidnap his heir, and send him to the plantations; that the South Sea Scheme had turned out a most advantageous speculation, though the immense gains of Sir John Blunt, and the suspicious manœuvres of the more active of his coadjutors had already excited the public attention.

They gossiped on such matters with marvellous volubility, occasionally refreshing their tongues with the contents of their glasses, which the Baron with an impressive gallantry took care frequently to fill.

“But as to this forward little hussy,” said Mademoiselle Schulenburg, her eyes flashing with an additional fierceness, “there has been a huge disturbance made about her. The Brigadier has gone to the magistrates, and the Prince has applied to the Secretary of State; and the result is that a large reward has been offered for the discovery of the place where the young jade is concealed. I had no idea her absence would have caused such a stir as there now exists all over the town about her.”

“Oh it’s ever the case, my beloved Schulenburg,” replied Madame Kielmansegge, with a toss of her immense head. “There is always a monstrous deal more fuss made about these good-for-nothing little chits, if anything happens to them, than they are worth.”

“But we must be quick, Baron,” added the thin lady. “I cannot rest till this minx is disposed of in a manner that shall prevent her troubling us for the future. There is a ship at Blackwall; she could be got on board on the first dark night; and might be safe as a slave in the Plantations before her friends had discontinued their exertions to recover her.”

“Well, for my part,” added her bulky com-

panion, as she took a good sip at the glass, "I'm for the short and sure. We've got her fast enough, and can dispose of her as we like, without exciting suspicion. To take her to the ship would be to risk discovery. I think there could be no great difficulty in getting rid of her at once."

"I think so too," said the Schulenburg in a decided tone. "The Lord has placed her in our hands, let us avail ourselves of His goodness. The King too has been inquiring urgently after her; I think we should best consider our own safety, by quietly putting her out of the way. The old hag you employ would manage the matter as expeditiously as possible."

Mary Lepel stole away from the door as noiselessly as she had approached it. As she did so, she saw on a table several articles of female apparel which there could be no doubt the two favourites had placed there upon their entering the house. The thought entered her mind that by their assistance she might succeed in making her escape. In the next moment, with a mask on her face, a hood over her head, a muff in her hand, and as quickly putting on a few other articles of a lady's walking costume, she went out of the

door and proceeded down stairs ; and through a passage at the bottom of that flight she found a door which led to the hall.

On entering the hall three yawning footmen in gaudy liveries catching as they thought a glimpse of their mistress, with a vast show of alacrity opened the street door where a chariot was seen standing. The steps were instantly put down, the lady got in, the door was banged to, and the carriage rolled off. The footmen, notwithstanding they had brought two ladies, exhibited no surprise at only one returning. They had learned in the service in which they were to take no notice of anything respecting their mistress, however strange it might be ; and as their mistress had thought proper to enter the carriage without Madame Kielmansegge, they sagaciously considered that they had no business to be surprised, and had nothing to do but to give directions to the fat coachman to drive home, which the latter functionary did with as much expedition as he could put into the heavy heels of his fat horses.

Mary Lepel, when she had got about a hundred yards from the house, began to breathe a little more freely. She had effected her escape in a manner any heroine might be proud of, and with

an ease and celerity the most astonishing. She wondered at her own courage, and wondered more at her presence of mind in a position of so much danger. But so far she had done well. There was still much to do. She was in the carriage of a most vindictive enemy, and where that carriage might be taking her, she had not the least idea, and she did not dare to inquire.

For some time the handsome vehicle, with its fat coachman sitting in great state on the box, and the three tall footmen clinging to the back, proceeded along a road bounded on each side by hedges. It was evident from the number of vehicles of different kinds, and of horsemen they met, that they were not a long way distant from town. She next passed several comfortable looking mansions, and presently came upon long straggling lines of houses. She looked in vain for any object she could recognize; she had not the most remote idea where she was, or where she was going. In all the numberless adventures she had read of, she remembered nothing so extremely embarrassing as the one in which she was now engaged.

CHAPTER X.

J E N N Y ' S W H I M .

" Ah, ma'am, you did not know Miss Howe,

" I'll tell you all her history," he cried.

At this Charles Stanhope gaped extremely wide.

" At Leicester House her passion first began,

And Nanty Lowther was a pretty man."

SIR CHARLES HANBURY WILLIAMS.

" I'm monstrous uneasy about our dear Molly Lepel," exclaimed Sophy Howe to Mary Bellenden, as they sat together in the former's dressing room finishing their toilet. " I hope no harm has happened to her. She was always mighty civil to me, and I own I was vastly fond of her in return."

" *Ma foi!* she was infinitely good natured, always ready to oblige, always willing to do good," replied Mary Bellenden, her countenance becom-

ing troubled. "But she is now just as she was at school, the best of us all. *Parbleu !* I would rather have lost two lovers than one Mary Lepel."

"I'll be hanged if I would not rather have lost a dozen," cried the other with animation. "In fact, child, I think both of us could spare a few. I would readily give up all my lot, even including Peterborough, much as I like that queer creature, to get back our beloved Molly."

"Would you give up that dear, deceitful, languishing Lowther, *ma chère ?*" inquired her companion archly.

"Oh do not name the wretch to me. I positively hate him!" answered Sophy Howe. "I do indeed. I hear he is always with that good-for-nothing jade Lady Bab Brilliant. I rarely see his worthless face, except in public, when in his odious way he sometimes ventures to say a civil thing to me as if he had seen me for the first time. It so moves one to be treated in this abominable manner, that one can scarcely refrain from boxing the coxcomb's ears."

"Ah, *ma mignonne*, I doubt he is half so troublesome as Argyle," said Mary Bellenden, putting some French ribbons into her hair. "I

am strangely pestered by the sedate way in which my fine Colonel chooses to behave. When he considers I am bestowing more of my attention on another than he approves of, he keeps as strictly aloof from me as though I had the plague. *Mon Dieu!* if I did not like him so well as I do, I would give the varlet his *coup de grace* the first time I met him. If I but speak to Wharton he withdraws himself as if to make way for his Grace. If I mention Dormer he seems provokingly anxious I should enjoy that gentleman's society; and if I smile on the Prince his loyalty becomes quite rampant. I almost wish I had not agreed to meet him to-day."

"What, at Jenny's Whim?" inquired the other hastily, "I wouldn't give up the frolic I intend enjoying there, for a hundred Lowthers and Argyles together. Why, I have been given to understand that we shall pass our time so pleasantly we shall be vastly loath to leave the place in time for dinner. I greatly enjoy these unceremonious entertainments. 'Tis a prodigious relief from the hum-drum way in which we have been living."

"*Pardonnez moi, ma belle!* surely we have our pleasures," replied Lord Bellenden's daughter.

"Pleasures indeed!" cried Sophy Howe, with a

saucy toss of her beautiful head. "Reading a well-thumbed volume of the Spectator, or listening to the disputations on philosophy the Princess is so fond of encouraging, till the disputants are only kept by dread of their illustrious patroness from pummelling each other on the spot, varied by the interminable gossip of the Duke of Devonshire respecting the grandfathers and grandmothers of my Lord this, and my Lady t'other:—hang me, if I am not heartily sick of it."

"*Sans doute*, being Maid of Honour is dull work sometimes," added Mary Bellenden, "prodigiously dull work; but, *ma foi!* there is also much amusement in it. We have plenty of beaux."

"Fools are to be found everywhere, and a palace is sure to be their head quarters," answered her lively friend, as she carefully placed a patch in its appointed place. "It's a monstrous good thing we are allowed pretty well to do as we like, when not in presence; and our hardest task when on duty is to keep our countenances. The men help certainly to render us pretty comfortable. The Prince particularly. May I die a maid," she cried, laughingly, "if ever any poor woman was plagued with such a mass of awkwardness

and imbecility. T'other day he let me know, as a great secret, he loved me."

"Oh, the rogue! he told me the same," added the other, in the same merry humour.

"Well, child, he furthermore honoured me by inquiring what I should do if he tried the flavour of my rosy lips."

"*Est-il possible?* and what did you say?"

"I replied I should heartily box his royal ears."

"*Ma foi!* that was well said. What did he reply to that?"

"He laughed, and chucked me under the chin, and told me he should try his luck the first favourable opportunity. And added, in h's broken English: 'I should zee, I should zee,' and I replied: He should feel, he should feel."

"*Mon Dieu!* he is a sad husband for our dear Princess."

"And a sad lover to our dear Howard, eh Molly?" answered her friend, maliciously; "but apropos of lovers; I had mighty pretty sport with mine t'other night at the masquerade held at the Sun in Wych-street. I had heard my swain was to be there, so disguised myself as a shepherdess, and took a chair, and soon found myself in as motley a crowd of noisy fools as ever met together."

“ *Parbleu !* You went alone !”

“To be sure I did. I tried to find out my beau, but could not distinguish him among so many. I was not long before a smart, well-made shepherd makes up to me ; and he uttered so many inquiries after my sheep, and as to whether my lambs had gone astray, and the like rustic questions, with a good deal of wit, that I was mightily diverted. He seemed no less entertained by me, for I did my best to shine, and I suppose succeeded, for he did not leave me all the evening. He was so vastly pleasant and gallant, I began to be prodigiously curious to know who he was ; and I could easily see by his questions he was no less anxious to discover who *I* was. At last we both agreed to unmask at the same moment. And who do you think the fellow was, after all ?”

“ *Ma foi !* Perhaps, some city apprentice.”

“Anthony Lowther, as I hope for a husband !”

“ *Mon Dieu !*”

“We both were not a little astonished by our mutual discovery ; but he positively swore he knew me all the time by my incomparable shape ; and I vowed as stoutly I knew him by his genteel

air. However, he made himself vastly agreeable, and I ended by falling more in love with the wretch than before."

"Did I tell you how I behaved to my Colonel in the Ring, yesterday, *ma chère*?"

"No, Molly, not a word. But tell me quickly, for I want to be off to Jenny's Whim."

"I was riding on a high-spirited little horse, when he shied at a soldier crossing the road, and in a moment was off at speed. *Ma foi*! I should have been off, too, had not that civil creature made a rush and, at some considerable risk, pulled him short up. I wore a mask, as I usually do, and my squire had not the slightest suspicion of who he had rescued; but, in the middle of a monstrous fine speech respecting his worship's satisfaction at having been of service to a lady, I discovered myself. He was overwhelmed with confusion, and I rated him soundly for his gallantry to strangers; protesting against the wrong he did me by his risking his life for other ladies when he should be entirely devoted to me. He did not know what to say for himself; but began to be prodigiously tender as we rode on together. In the midst of this good understanding, up came those rival antiquities the Dukes of Somerset and

Buckingham, and as soon as I replied to their tender greetings, my fine Colonel, in the usual dudgeon, makes me a low bow, as much as to say your very humble servant ; and would you believe me, *ma belle !* trots away as unconcernedly as if leaving the merest acquaintance in the world !”

The two beauties at last completed their toilets, and in a very short time afterwards they might have been seen in a hired chariot taking the road to Chelsea. They laughed, and talked all the way about who they were going to meet, and how they should behave to them. But whilst they are progressing, it would be perhaps as well if we were to say something about their place of destination.

Jenny’s Whim was a celebrated suburban tavern, situated at the end of the wooden bridge at Chelsea. There were gardens attached to it, and a bowling-green, and parties were frequently made, composed of ladies and gentlemen, to enjoy a day’s amusement there in eating strawberries and cream, syllabubs, cake, and taking other refreshments, of which a great variety could be procured, with cider, perry, ale, wine, and other liquors in abundance.

The gentlemen played at bowls — some employed themselves at skittles, whilst the ladies amused themselves at a swing, or wandered about the garden admiring the sunflowers, hollyhocks, the Duke of Marlborough cut out of a filbert-tree, and the roses, and daisies, currants and gooseberries that spread their alluring charms in every path.

This was a favourite rendezvous for lovers in courting time—a day's pleasure at Jenny's Whim being considered by the fair one the most enticing enjoyment that could be offered her ; and often the hearts of the most obdurate have given way beneath the influence of its attractions. Jenny's Whim, therefore, had always during the season plenty of pleasant parties of young people of both sexes. Sometimes all its chambers were filled, and its gardens thronged by gay and sentimental visitors.

The two Maids of Honour found their way there with very little difficulty, and were quickly shewn into a clean and tidy chamber, with a bow window looking out over the fields towards Chelsea College. They had scarcely arrived, before a couple of well dressed gentlemen, whose appearance commanded the landlord's most obsequious at-

tention, lightly ran up the stairs and entered the same rooms.

Then followed a volley of friendly greetings, and pretty compliments, and pleasant speeches, seemingly without end, which helped to create an infinity of excellent mirth. Anthony Lowther had come to press the siege he had hitherto carried on so cautiously. He was amazingly tender in his attention, and gazed, as though with a heart teeming with passion, at the animated physiognomy of his mistress. His lustrous eyes were full of that languishing expression which had given so expressive an affix to his name, and his manner was as dangerous as his looks.

Colonel Argyle was equally resolved to captivate; but he had very opposite ways and means of doing so. He was a totally distinct sort of person to the distinguished Lady Killer, to whom we have just alluded; possessing about as much diffidence as Nanty Lowther had assurance, and being as ignorant of the philosophy of a woman's heart, as his friend boasted of being learned in it. But Colonel Argyle was sincere, devoted, honest, and fearless; he would stop at nothing to obtain so rich a guerdon as the hand of Lord Bellenden's daughter; but he required as much sincerity, as

much devotion, as much honesty as he brought; and a misgiving that he should succeed, would often be sufficient to make him for some time desist in the pursuit.

The little party sat at a small round table before the open window enjoying their strawberries and cream, making pleasant observations on the merry groups below, and interchanging compliments and jests with equal facility. The cream was good, the strawberries better, and every one seemed disposed for as much enjoyment as the place afforded. There was much talking, much laughing, and plenty of good humour, and even the quiet and reserved Colonel appeared inclined to be as completely at his ease, as the less interested Nanty Lowther undoubtedly was.

“I suppose I am wondrous easily satisfied,” exclaimed Sophy Howe in her free and careless manner, as she spooned up the grateful fruit. “But I fancy there may be worse things in this troublesome world than eating fresh fruit at Jenny’s Whim.”

“No doubt, Madam Howe,” replied Anthony Lowther; “but the Colonel and I coincide in thinking our company the best of the feast.”

“I protest to you, I did not think of that,”

said the first speaker. "Of course your company is all the feast to us two simple damsels. Is it not Molly?"

"*Sans doute*," replied Mary Bellenden; "strawberries and cream are very well in their way; but agreeable beaux are a much choicer dish."

Mr. Lowther endeavoured to explain; but the two lively girls would not understand his explanation, and insisted that gentlemen so extremely gallant, so prodigiously civil, and so exquisitely well-bred, rose in their estimation like South Sea Stock.

"Talking of South Sea Stock," said the Colonel, "the people seem in a desperate frenzy to embark whatever they possess in this popular speculation. Sir John Blunt has become a greater man than the Prime Minister, and his levees are more numerously attended!"

"Never mind Sir John Blunt, Colonel," cried the lively Sophy Howe, refilling her mouth; "we have no room for him here. I'm sick of hearing the fellow's name. We haven't met to discuss the merits of South Sea Stock, but of strawberries and cream. We will have nothing to do with Mammon. Scandal and Gossip are our only gods."

"No, no," said Anthony Lowther shaking his handsome head, "not our only ones. Cupid is not to be forgotten in the presence of those who so nearly resemble his mother."

"Oh your humble servant Sir !" replied Sophy Howe jumping up and hastily making a curtsy. "Child, why don't you shew your sense of Mr. Lowther's compliment to us?" she added, addressing her schoolfellow.

"*Ma foi*, I'm vastly obliged to him," said Lord Bellenden's daughter ; "but we have so often passed for Venus, whom of course, we greatly resemble, that the compliment has become a little out of date. What do you think of the matter, Colonel?"

"To tell you the plain truth, I have no great opinion of Madam Venus," answered that officer gravely ; "by all accounts she didn't bear the best of characters. I had rather you should be likened to a more respectable personage."

"Oh fie, Colonel !" exclaimed Sophy Howe ; "considering how attached Venus was to Mars, I am surprised you should venture to speak so ill of her."

"*Bon Dieu*, how ungrateful he is !" cried Mary Bellenden. "I doubt he should be trusted by any

of the sex, for fear they should afterwards be looked on as ill as the bewitching goddess."

"For my part I am monstrous taken with Venus," said Anthony Lowther, filling his mouth with fruit; "her free nature and liberal disposition are just such as ought naturally to belong to the dear creatures themselves. She is undoubtedly *their* goddess; and the more nearly they resemble her in their natures, the more closely will they approach her in their power."

"Well it's something to know that," cried Sophy Howe with a laugh; "but goddesses are rather too high for imitation. My modesty would not allow me to take such a model."

"I'm prodigious glad to hear it!" exclaimed Colonel Argyle with emphasis. "But let us get on with our feast. It's mighty well talking of ancient deities; but I for one know a modern one worth all that Greece and Rome could boast of, in the way of women."

"Here's a flatterer for you!" cried Sophy Howe, pausing with her well-filled spoon half way to her mouth. "'Tis a thousand pities you don't let us know that matchless fair. She should be our queen—our mistress;—the one sole head and chief of our humble community."

Mary Bellenden was silent; she fancied she could make a very good guess at this feminine wonder.

"But we have lost sight of Cupid all this time," here observed Anthony Lowther, with all the impressiveness of a lover. "I hope we are not going to renounce his company."

"Not for worlds!" replied Sophy Howe, laughing. "For my part, I can't do without him. He must be my companion and guide. He is to me, all that the little dog is to the blind:—I can't go a step unless he shews me the way."

"*Ma foi*, it is just so with me," added Lord Bellenden's daughter. "I seem to be in a great fog; but Cupid is my link-boy, and I get along safely and pleasantly through the very thick of it."

"'Egad, I'm inclined to think Cupid has a monstrous busy time of it!" observed Anthony Lowther. "He plays little dog to one, and link-boy to another:—it is to be hoped his services are well remunerated."

"He's paid like a prince, of course," cried Sophy Howe. "But as he accepts nothing but sighs and vows, and sonnets and love-letters, his treasury may be more fully than richly supplied."

The little party laughed joyously at these ideas,

and at several more of the same nature ; and their pleasant repast proceeded most pleasantly till its conclusion. A division of the two couples then took place. Sophy Howe and Anthony Lowther looking from the window upon the various parties in the garden and bowling green ; and Colonel Argyle and Mary Bellenden remaining in a distant party of the room engaged in a conversation that appeared more than ordinarily interesting to them both.

Lord Bellenden's daughter had made such constant use of the finishing graces of her education, that all her acquaintance were as well acquainted with every shrug, grimace, nod, shake, and pet phrase, as herself. They had once had a marvellous effect ; and the most accomplished Frenchwoman of that age might have been satisfied with the impression she produced by a judicious use of them, at her first entrance into society. But then they were novelties :—now they were as well known as the signs in the Strand.

She therefore began to relax a little in reproducing her Parisian recollections ; administering them sparingly, according to the state of the patient, and modifying her French prejudices to render them more intelligible to an English mind.

In short, she was getting rid of a great deal of affectation, and the better soil that lay beneath was now about to be brought into cultivation.

Colonel Argyle was much less constrained than usual. He spoke in a vein of good sense and right feeling, and finding himself more at his ease, was fast getting rid of the obstacles to a proper understanding with the object of his affections. For it was as evident as light to the lookers on, that the gallant Colonel was deeply attached to the beautiful Mary Bellenden; and it was also pretty clear that that elegant and graceful creature was as well disposed towards him, as it was possible for so distinguished a beauty to be towards a male acquaintance. These confidential communications did a vast deal of good to the feelings of both. They determined to get rid as soon as they could, of whatever stood in the way of their mutual attachment.

In the meantime, there was much of the same nature going on between the other couple; but there was a great deal of difference in their proceedings. They conversed in a low voice. With languishing Lowther there was the employment of much insidious flattery:—that potent engine which in skilful hands has undermined so many

female hearts. His words were most powerful ; but more powerful still were his looks. His soft, seductive air was exercised upon his heedless companion with a most striking effect ;—his delusive smile, his enamoured glance, were singularly potent.

The giddy Sophy heard his thrilling praises with a careless ease, as though they were things she did not much care for : she appeared to treat the matter as a jest, and bantered her lover on the extent of his devotion. She played with the flame she had herself created ; yet approached it nearer and nearer till it threatened to scorch her with its heat. This apparent carelessness, however, did not deceive the experienced eye of such a professed lady-killer as Nanty Lowther. The bird was merely fluttering before the eyes of the careful fowler, previously to the move that was to fix her irretrievably in the net.

In this manner the two pairs of lovers amused themselves for some time, till they thought proper to enter the gardens, and observe the amusements that were there being enjoyed. From this scene they soon found it necessary to take their departures, as they discovered that the eccentric Lord Peterborough was amongst the

company, and neither of them wished at that moment for his presence. His Lordship had got with him a foreign singer—a female of considerable personal attractions, and shewy appearance, to whom his gallant attentions were as conspicuous, as they were ridiculous. His cadaverous frame was bending obsequiously to his companion, as he flourished in his hand an immense bludgeon—often much too near some of the company to be agreeable. He had approached a city exquisite, who in his bearing was a remarkably choice specimen of vulgar conceit, strutting along in a bran new suit, with a splendid cocked hat and periwig, fully satisfied in his mind that he was monopolising all the admiration of the place.

Lord Peterborough, as he was flourishing his favourite stick, brought it on a sudden to bear with prodigious force on the beau's cocked hat. Had the blow fallen a little lower, it might have knocked the man's head off; as it was, it merely sent to a most inconvenient distance, the beau's cocked hat and wig; and he stood amid the laughter of the crowd as his Lordship commenced a formal apology for his inadvertence, as ridiculous an over-dressed figure, surmounted by a bald head, as it is possible to imagine.

The little party from the Court having witnessed this scene made a hasty retreat, rather than bring upon themselves the notice of the eccentric Earl. Sophy Howe insisted upon being taken to the Chelsea Bun-House; a demand immediately seconded with equal vivacity by Mary Bellenden. The gentlemen had nothing for it, but to submit; and in a short time the lovers saw before them the identical long low building, at that time so celebrated throughout the metropolis.

They were just on the point of mounting the steps, for a supply of the delicious little cakes for which the place had become famous, when a carriage was noticed approaching, with rather more than the usual speed attempted by such vehicles in those days.

"*Bon Dieu !*" exclaimed Mary Bellenden, in some surprise. "Here comes the Schulenburg's chariot. I wonder what evil errand she has been about. We will have a good look at her at any rate."

"Is it the Maypole or the Elephant and Castle?" inquired Sophy Howe, laughingly. "Or are the two Dulcineas taking the air together?"

"It must be the former," observed Anthony

Lowther. "She has lately assumed the royal livery, and here she comes in all her newly-acquired grandeur, the plainest woman who ever fascinated a sovereign."

"There is but one person in the carriage," observed the Colonel, who was watching intently the approaching vehicle, as well as the rest.

The awkward cumbrous and gaudy vehicle approached at a moderate trot, driven by the fat coachman, now looking more stately than a Lord Chancellor, and with the three tall footmen in the same flaring livery clinging behind. The glass was down on the side nearest the Bun-house, so that the little party who had just arrived there could see into the vehicle without any difficulty. One person only was visible, and she sat so near the door as greatly to favour Sophy Howe's desire of having a good stare—to obtain which enjoyment she planted herself a little before her companions fully intent upon raising a laugh at the expense of the royal favourite.

The carriage had reached them, and what was the astonishment and alarm of the young beauties at observing the inmate suddenly lean her body half out of the window and call them by name, with piercing shrieks and cries for help.

“Gracious Heavens, that is not Mademoiselle Schulenburg !” exclaimed Sophy Howe.

“That is our dear Molly Lepel’s voice !” cried Mary Bellenden, looking extremely excited. “I’m sure it is. Stop the carriage, Colonel ; for God’s sake stop the carriage. There is foul play going on.”

“Hie, coachman !”

“Stop, rascal !” cried both gentlemen at once ; and at the same moment both sprung forward. The coachman did not seem inclined to stop, as he had before now found it necessary to employ increased speed on such summonses, instead of pulling up ; and fearing his mistress was about to be complimented after the customary fashion, he whipped his horses preparatory to a start.

On went the carriage at full speed, with a lady screaming out of the open window and the two gentlemen in furious pursuit, shouting lustily to the passengers to stop the horses ; which had such an effect upon all persons within, hearing that a rush was made by every man within a reasonable distance, in the firm conviction one of the King’s ugly frows was carrying off the lady who was crying out so lustily.

The carriage was stopped : the gentlemen soon

opened the door, and to the complete bewilderment of the portly coachman and his three tall assistants in crimson and gold-lace, a strange young lady, whose mask had dropped off in her struggle, was carried fainting out of the vehicle. As neither of the servants could give any account of how they came by her, and she was immediately recognised as the missing daughter of Brigadier General Lepel, they were on the point of being roughly used by the clamorous mob that had quickly assembled, and were extremely desirous of hanging them together, when a constable coming up ended the discussion by taking all four to the round-house on the unusual charge of stealing a Maid of Honour.

The accused were accompanied by a riotous assemblage, pelting them with mud till their gaudy finery was in a most woeful pickle. Disappointed in the summary justice they were so desirous of inflicting, the mob turned their rage upon Mademoiselle Schulenburg's fine vehicle which they soon made in a condition to be used only as a pig-sty.

CHAPTER XI.

PIPING TIMES AT COURT.

From peer or bishop 'tis no easy thing
To draw the man who loves his God or King ;
Alas ! I copy ; or my draught would fail,
From honest Mahomet or plain parson Hale.

POPE.

ONCE more we must return to courtly scenes, or rather to scenes that, though they belonged to the Court, had little of the Court belonging to them. We return to his Britannic Majesty, who happened to be closeted with his Prime Minister. Were they absorbed in discussing the extraordinary state of affairs on the continent, or at least directing their attention to some of the many important points included in home politics ?* Sir Robert Walpole was an able man ; and his able measures, notwithstanding the unprincipled opposition he met with, had been greatly approved by

his sovereign. What then formed the subject of this consultation between the King and his Minister? Were they examining maps or referring to despatches, deciphering secret intelligence, or discussing new measures? They were doing nothing of the kind. They were sitting quietly opposite each other, yet at a convenient distance, with no other occupation than smoking their pipes.

Yes, the King was in an extremely amiable mood, with some satisfactory arrangement respecting his Hanoverian territories his Minister had just completed, and he had shown his royal appreciation of his merits by inviting Sir Robert to come and smoke a pipe with him. The statesman had accepted the invitation, and it was just twenty minutes since he had been prevailed upon to sit down and apply himself to a long clay tube such as he beheld in the hands of his sovereign, since the royal mouth had opened to let out anything but smoke.

There sat the King in his eternal snuff-coloured suit, with his wig half off his head—his features more dull and heavy than ever as he continued to watch the wreaths of vapour that curled from his lips, and vanished above his head. He saw all sorts

of strange things in that tobacco smoke. Faces that he had not seen for years or wished to see, appeared to glare at him from every dissolving wreath above him; and the one face—the fair pallid face that had so long haunted him, seemed to peep forth from the mass of vapour before it mingled with the surrounding atmosphere, with that touching expression which had often before so sorely troubled his conscience.

The Minister was much better dressed than his master. He was not an exquisite, but he appeared as became the head of his family and the Prime Minister of England. He looked becomingly grave, and smoked with the air of one fully appreciating the gracious mark he was enjoying of his royal master's confidence. This confidence, however, it was not at all likely he would abuse—simply because as yet nothing had been told him. Sir Robert longed for a break in this long silence; and busied himself with thinking of the subjects most likely to excite his Majesty's observations. Foreign policy, the state of parties at home, finance, war, religion, science, and taxation, were rapidly run over; and yet his gracious sovereign opened his lips only to let out the smoke, he kept so systematically drawing out of his clay pipe.

At last the King hemmed—the usual preliminary of a speech from the throne ; but possibly his Majesty thought better of it ; for he did not remit for a moment the regular little column of vapour that at every exhalation issued from his mouth. Sir Robert was beginning to feel fidgetty. He was a public speaker, used to a pretty constant action of his organs of speech, and this enforced inactivity became extremely irksome. But Sir Robert was as loyal a courtier as ever entered a palace. He would not on any account infringe the usual etiquette.

The Minister puffed, and the King puffed, with equal silence and solemnity, for at least ten minutes longer. At last his Britannic Majesty removed the end of his pipe from between his lips, and turned his dull gaze upon his associate. The watchful statesman in a moment made his mouth dismiss its companion, and looking respectfully towards his sovereign, prepared to give his Majesty the information on the various important points he had so diligently been conning over for the last half hour, he fully anticipated the King would require. The King hemmed again.

“The Herr von Sauercrout makes capital puddings,” slowly drawled out the King.

“Oh! superlative puddings, please your Majesty,” answered the Minister, a little disconcerted at being obliged to speak on so totally unexpected a subject as the merits of the King’s cook. “His Majesty will glide at once to a subject of a higher interest,” thought he. But this expectation was disappointed by the King returning the pipe to his mouth, and beginning to smoke with more energy than ever. The silence now seemed more intense; and Sir Robert Walpole puffed on with the fullest conviction that the King’s confidence was not to be coveted by any man who loved the cheerful sounds of the human voice.

After another long interval had elapsed the King made a second brief communication. It was nothing more than a question as to the price of tobacco; which was as briefly answered as it was spoken. In this way, infinitely to the dissatisfaction of the Prime Minister, his Britannic Majesty, at immense long intervals, avoiding every reference to matters of importance, made remarks and asked questions of an extremely unconfidential nature.

It seemed, however, as if his mind was wandering; for the King did not look as though he

understood the import of what he said. Yet Sir Robert had the impression that his royal master had something on his mind which he wished to communicate; and he put himself to a deal of hard thinking to discover what it could be. He was certain that he never could have been invited to the high honour of smoking a pipe with his Majesty, unless there was some matter on which he was to be consulted.

Could it be respecting the annexation of Bremen and Verden to the Electorate? He knew it to be a favourite project with the King; and it was very likely that his Majesty required his assistance in bringing it to a conclusion. Could it have any connexion with the secret marriage, of which he had heard, of his Majesty with Mademoiselle Schulenburg? It was very natural he might be consulted by the King on his taking so important a step. Could it relate to the mysterious affair, of which he never could obtain any authentic intelligence, in some way connected with Hanover, in which his Majesty appeared so deeply interested? He had heard a few expressions dropped both by father and son, respecting this mysterious affair, that had extremely excited his curiosity; but

though he had sounded the mistresses, and “pumped” the Turks, he had learned nothing respecting it from either.

“My dear friend,” said the King very gravely, as he was replenishing his pipe, “I much desire to possess your valuable opinion.”

“Now,” thought Sir Robert, “it is coming;” and he felt a secret satisfaction at his own sagacity in anticipating the King’s intention. While his Majesty re-lit his pipe, his Minister launched out in well-studied phrases upon the pride and happiness he felt in the honour his sovereign conferred upon him in asking his advice. The King smoked on, and nodded his head.

“Yes, my dear Sir Robert, I want your opinion,” continued the King. “The Schulenburg—”

“The secret marriage,” thought the statesman to himself; “I thought as much.”

“The Schulenburg is very anxious—” added the King.

“No doubt she is,” thought the Minister. “I hope,” said he, in a confidential yet perfectly respectful tone, “that in a short time all cause of anxiety may be removed.”

“I hope so too, my good friend,” said the

King; and he continued to smoke with a pertinacity extremely provoking to the tantalized statesman. "I told her I thought you could assist her, if any one could," at last he added. Sir Robert poured out his thanks most copiously—"But she appears to me in a very critical state."

Sir Robert was astonished, and looked concerned. He had not heard of the lady's illness, or he should have sent to make inquiries. He hoped the indisposition was not so serious as was supposed. In his heart, however, he was extremely glad there existed a chance, however remote, of getting rid of so troublesome an *intriguante*.

"The Schulenburg is not ill," observed the King, gravely; "it is her parrot that is indisposed."

Sir Robert looked bewildered. He thought that the mind of his sovereign was wandering.

"Yes, the Schulenburg's parrot is moulting," said his Majesty quietly, after a few more puffs; "and I told her I would ask you what treatment it should have."

"Wring its neck, and the Schulenburg's too!" the disconcerted Minister would have exclaimed, if he had not restrained his rising indignation; as it was, he had great difficulty in concealing his feel-

ings. It appeared such a deplorable humiliation, after he had been indulging in so many speculations on the cause of his sovereign's condescension. Instead of requiring his judgment in a matrimonial alliance, or the annexation of a province, he had been called upon to prescribe for a parrot with the pip.

Fortunately for him, the doors leading to the ante-room opened at that moment, and the stalwart Mahomet made his appearance.

"Who waits?" demanded the King, without taking his pipe from his mouth.

"The English General Lepel, most dreaded Lord! and his daughter," replied the Turk, with his customary salutation.

"His daughter! the Brigadier's daughter!" exclaimed the King. "How is this, Walpole? The Brigadier's daughter that was missing comes here with her father, desiring an audience?"

"He must have good cause for taking such a step, please your Majesty," answered the Minister, "or you may be sure he would not do so."

"Admit them," said the King; and in a moment the Turk had disappeared. The King and his Minister puffed on in perfect silence; but the sagacious Walpole felt a conviction that there

must be something more than ordinary in the Brigadier seeking an audience at that time. There *was* something more than ordinary that could have induced such an accomplished courtier as Brigadier General Lepel to disturb his sovereign's privacy. But though the Brigadier was a courtier, he was also a father; and the outrage that had been committed on his child was one he could not hear of, courtier as he was, without seeking to bring the criminals to justice. He therefore sought an audience with the King, that his daughter might make him acquainted with the infamous transaction.

The old beau and his lovely daughter entered, not a little surprised to find the King and his Minister so employed. They were graciously received by the sovereign; and Sir Robert also encouraged them with a glance of recognition. On being asked what had brought them to the palace, the Brigadier, in forcible language, alluded to the abduction of his child, and requested the King would listen to her statement of the extraordinary adventure in which she had been made the chief actor. The King having readily granted the desired permission, Mary Lepel stepped forward, and with a singular union of grace and

modesty, that would have done honour to the best of her favourite heroines, gave a circumstantial account of the whole proceeding.

The King listened—apparently with profound attention ; instead of which, his attention was absorbed by the beauty of the youthful Maid of Honour : and by the associations which arose out of a fancied resemblance she bore to a lady whose history was intimately connected with his own. Sir Robert Walpole also listened—his interest visibly increasing as the narrative progressed ; and at last he forgot his pipe in considering the extraordinary character or the disclosures he heard. It went out ; and he put it aside.

The King's attention was at length drawn to Mary Lepel's story, by hearing the name of Baron Bothmar ; and as soon as he caught the meaning of the Baron's connection with the mysterious adventure, he glanced at his Minister with an expression that fully satisfied Sir Robert the King felt as indignant as himself. He smoked on more vigorously than ever—never attempting to interrupt the narrator in her revelations ; but from time to time casting looks at his Minister, which the latter well knew how to interpret.

At last the Brigadier's daughter came to that

part in her narrative, where she discovered the connection of Mademoiselle Schulenburg and Madame Kielmansegge in the transaction. The King looked uneasy; but as the young lady proceeded to relate her escape disguised in Mademoiselle Schulenburg's apparel, her drive in her carriage from the house in which she had been kept a prisoner, and her joyful recognition by her friends; the forcible stoppage of the carriage, and the care and affection shewn to her by her schoolfellows, till she was sufficiently recovered to proceed to town, his interest was again deeply excited.

Sir Robert Walpole had heard the participation of the King's mistresses in the abduction of the Brigadier's daughter with some alarm, fearing their overpowering influence would shut out all hope of justice from the Brigadier; but as he witnessed the King's increased interest in the narrative, his distrust gave way, and he began to speculate on the chance it afforded of being used to some profit against these mischievous women—an extremely desirable return for the humiliation he had so recently had to endure, in relation to Mademoiselle Schulenburg's parrot.

The Brigadier's daughter had continued her

narrative to its conclusion, in a manner that must have satisfied the most sceptical as to its truth. She felt it to be an arduous task, a task that would have tried the ability of a Clelia or a Statira; but as she had so well undergone the trials and perils of these adventures, she satisfied herself that there could be nothing very formidable in her going through a narrative of them. She acquitted herself exceedingly well, and made a powerful impression, where it was most essential to her interests.

There was a silence of some few minutes at the termination of her narrative, only broken by the regular exhalations of the royal smoker. Sir Robert did not like to disturb it, not knowing whether he might do harm or good; he waited for his royal master to give him his cue. The King looked extremely grave, and puffed on with a steady regularity, as if he did not intend to leave off till the pipe was exhausted.

“Take your daughter home, Brigadier,” he said at last, remitting for a moment his whiffs; “we will consider what is best to be done.” On saying these words, the King discharging another mouthful of smoke, gently raised the suppliant Maid of Honour with one hand, and kissed her

cheek, then gave his disengaged hand to be saluted by her father; and then more gravely than ever, puffed away whilst the father and daughter retired.

The King made a sign to his Minister to renew his pipe, which he did, and both smoked away again in profound silence. Although Sir Robert Walpole's tongue lay idle, his mind was even more busy than usual. The King's Hanoverian favourites had been intolerable clogs to the machinery of his government; their rapacity, their ignorance, and their ambition doing the King incalculable mischief with his subjects, and giving his Ministers continual annoyance. But they were a privileged nuisance, which he and his colleagues not only were obliged to tolerate, but were equally obliged to court.

Sir Robert thought that an opportunity was opening for getting rid of these foreign harpies—who, notwithstanding his apparent friendliness towards them, he had long felt to be thorns in his side—and was eager to avail himself of it; but the Minister knew this was involved not only in difficulty but in danger. The King was such a creature of habit, that whatever his convictions might be, he was so used to be led by his favour-

ites, it seemed almost too much to expect he would be willing to send them about their business in the summary fashion the case required.

As this train of uneasy thoughts passed through the mind of the cautious statesman, the monarch had also his reflections. They were even less agreeable. To the King's constant cause of disquietude was now joined another, that threatened to give him as much trouble. His mind shifted the scene of his uneasiness from Hanover to England, with the rapidity of a theatrical change; but he was a good deal bewildered by the additional difficulties presented to him, and smoked on with as uncomfortable feelings, as it was possible for so great a sovereign to experience after his third pipe.

"Walpole," he said at last, "have you heard anything of the Prince?"

Sir Robert had waited with more than the patience of an experienced chess player for the King's first move in the difficult game he thought he saw before him. It was made; and to his quick intelligence presented a most favourable commencement for his own play. A reconciliation between the King and his son he had long desired to effect; but had hitherto found insur-

mountable obstacles in the father's animosity, to which fresh fuel was daily given by the arts of his wily favourites. That the King should have made an inquiry after his son without an imprecation, was a most favourable omen, and the Minister immediately took advantage of it, by representing to his Majesty his Royal Highness's extreme concern at having excited his Majesty's displeasure; and his intense desire to shew himself as dutiful and affectionate as his royal father could wish him to be.

This was a pure fiction; but Walpole had previously given the Prince much sensible advice on the subject; and although the latter was entirely indifferent whether the quarrel was made up or not, he had given permission to the Minister to take what steps in the affair he thought best.

"Send for the Prince," replied the King; and smoked on apparently quite unconcerned at the evidence he had just heard of his son's contrition. Sir Robert lost no time in fulfilling the royal command; and then quietly refilled his pipe with tobacco and recommenced smoking with more gratification than ever he had given to the amusement in his life. He anticipated the most

favourable result from the approaching interview, and with the powerful assistance of the heir apparent began to hope he should get rid of the King's ugly harem and Hanoverian council, notwithstanding his Majesty's indolent disposition.

Whilst both parties were absorbed by their reflections, the folding doors were suddenly thrown wide open by the liveried Pages, and with all the ceremony due to his rank, the Groom of the Chambers announced "the Prince of Wales."

The Minister rose as the heir apparent entered. The Prince did not assume any extraordinary degree of feeling as he advanced towards the chair in which his father sat smoking, as unconcernedly as if there had never been the slightest ill feeling between them. Indeed his Majesty looked upon his heir as he would have noticed the appearance of a total stranger.

The Minister with a sort of trembling apprehension, regarded this mutual indifference. It differed greatly from "The Return of the Prodigal Son," he had allowed his imagination to depict. His Royal Highness he thought should have looked more contrite, and then his Majesty would have looked more conciliatory. As it was, one

heavy sullen set of features appeared the reflection of the other.

The fears of the statesman were at last relieved in the most agreeable manner ; for when the Prince approached his father, the King though he continued smoking, nodded to his son. His Royal Highness filially returned the recognition with the same motion of his head.

“ Take a pipe, George,” said the King.

The Prince took one from the table, quietly filled the bowl from the tobacco box, lit it, drew a chair near his father, and gravely commenced smoking. The Minister sat down with a light heart. The reconciliation was complete.

The King, the Prince, and the Prime Minister smoked for some time in silence ; but the most important arrangements were ultimately settled before the trio separated. His Britannic Majesty briefly stated that he had determined to visit Hanover, and should leave his son guardian of his English dominions during his absence. This journey had a double object—to give his attention to a matter that troubled his waking and sleeping thoughts, and to prevent Baron Bothmar and his associates from continuing their evil designs upon the Brigadier’s daughter.

The Prince heard the distinction conferred upon him, and thought less of the additional importance he would gain by it, than the additional advantages it would confer for carrying out his designs upon his Consort's "Maids of Honour."

CHAPTER XII.

N O P O P E - R Y.

Ah! friend! 'tis love—this truth you lovers know,
In vain my structures rise, my gardens grow,
In vain fair Thames reflects the double scenes
Of hanging mountains, and of sloping greens :
Joy lives not here ; to happier seats it flies,
And only dwells where Wortley casts her eyes.

POPE.

IT may not perhaps be unknown to the reader that within a few miles of our overgrown metropolis, there exists as perfect an Arcadia as the most classical of citizens could require. At least in this light, it was regarded early in the last century ; not perhaps so much by such men of business living east of Temple Bar as are now designated by that name, to whom the nearer and therefore more accessible Hackney or Islington, Clapham or Kennington, according to some particular predilection, possessed Arcadian charms

sufficient for their rural desires ; but certainly by those classes of the community who put forth greater pretensions to refinement and education, a circle embracing Richmond and its neighbouring villages was looked upon as a peculiarly desirable locality for a summer residence.

Amongst these, such persons as were in any way connected, or were desirous of being thought connected with the Court, formed a considerable portion ; and therefore many people of distinction might be found possessing either houses or lodgings at Richmond, Ham, Petersham, Hampton, Twickenham, Hammersmith, Kew and Isleworth, and other places in their vicinity. This had also been a favourite neighbourhood with royalty, of which Richmond, Kew and Hampton Court still contain evidences, and the new family seemed disposed in this respect, to adopt the taste of their predecessors. The old palaces were visited and much approved of, and Richmond Park, Kew Palace and Hampton Court became again the favourite summer haunts of the royal family of England.

But our business happens just now to have nothing to do either with Kings or Princes, or even with any of their titled or untitled followers,

although it lies with an individual acknowledged at this period to possess indisputable claims to distinction, and who resided in a villa within the favourite district just mentioned. This villa was very pleasantly situated on the banks of the Thames, near Twickenham; and its owner was the fashionable poet of his age, a man whose acquaintance was considered an honour by noblemen of the highest character and influence, and around whom many of those stars that rose above the literary horizon seemed content to revolve, as though they cared only to perform the duty of satellites to so great a luminary. This luminary was Alexander Pope.

He sat in an easy chair in a handsomely-furnished drawing-room, the glass doors opening upon a verdant lawn. He was dressed with elaborate neatness—an evident compromise between splendour and simplicity, which while it could be classed with neither, partook of both. Yet all the care that had been lavished upon his toilet could not conceal from the spectator, that his features were not handsome, that his figure was diminutive, nay, even deformed; and that his whole appearance was mean, and but for the intellectual expression of the

upper part of the face, extremely unprepossessing.

Nevertheless, at the moment he is unconsciously sitting for his portrait, he was as well satisfied with himself as was the beautiful Narcissus in the very height of his self-affection. He believed that he was about to prove the nothingness of physical perfection compared with the more impressive charms of intellect, and that the proof should be displayed in a manner the most flattering to his vanity—of which, like all deformed persons, he had an ample share—as it was possible for man or woman to imagine.

Among his numerous admirers of both sexes, to all appearance the most ardent and the most genuine, was a young and beautiful married lady of quality, who held the first place in the world of fashion. To draw so fair a creature from the adulation of a crowd of handsome and noble adorers, was a triumph only to be achieved by a master-mind; and when he thought he had found in her behaviour towards him unmistakable indications that she was tired of the insipid flatteries of handsome fools and titled fops, and that her eminently gifted intellect held in supreme contempt the advantages a peasant might possess as perfectly as a prince, he

felt satisfied his was the master-mind to achieve it.

He had seen her turn from the most eminent of the gay insects of fashion who had their sunshine in the eyes of her sex, to speak to him in language of the most gratifying, of the most encouraging tone and tendency. He had been habituated to praise, and to praise of as covetable a kind as a popular poet could desire ; for it came from eminent scholars and men of highly cultivated understandings holding commanding positions in the great world in which he was so ambitious of moving ; but all this affected him but little in comparison with the honeyed accents, accompanied as they were with the thrilling glances, of one fascinating woman.

Alexander Pope had had no experience in the affections of women of a rank so much higher than his own. He had heard, he had seen many things not likely to give him a very exalted opinion of their moral qualities ; and when he had began to address the lady who so distinguished him, in a language of high wrought gallantry that could not be misunderstood, and found it listened to with more favour than she chose to vouchsafe to the flatteries of his noble rivals, as he was pleased to

consider them, he could not but be satisfied he was gaining ground in her favour.

He had next addressed her in complimentary verses—so complimentary indeed, that a woman possessed of the smallest discernment must have seen the passionate heart, that in every tender line throbbed in her service. Smiles of the most bewitching character rewarded his muse ; and the imagination of the poet revelled in an inexpressible ecstasy, as he saw in the approving looks of his mistress how completely she responded to the sentiments he had dared to express.

So far all proceeded in accordance with his most sanguine wishes ; but he found that to proceed further in the affair, he must enjoy advantages, which the few interviews he was enabled to obtain in the gay circles in which he met the lady, did not confer. Emboldened by her encouragement, he invited her to visit his villa to inspect the garden he had just laid out on a new plan ; and, as if to complete his satisfaction, she readily consented—indeed she expressed the utmost delight at the idea.

Mr. Pope was now waiting in his handsomest apartment, the opportunity which was to enable him to forward his suit in the most satisfactory

manner. He had used the greatest care that his villa should be seen to the greatest advantage by his beautiful visitor. Everything had been placed where it could be seen to the best effect ; furniture, ornaments, flowers, pictures, and books were displayed only where they were most likely to please the eye. Nothing was allowed to intrude itself upon the attention calculated to introduce a discordant association.

The care which the poet had bestowed upon his property, he had not failed, as has already been stated, to bestow upon himself ; but the gay looking chairs and tables, the handsome mirrors, the attractive pictures, and the rest of the well-arranged decorations of the room, had evidently most rewarded his care. This however it may be presumed was not his own opinion : for after he had sent a well satisfied glance round the apartment, he never failed to look much longer, and with much greater satisfaction at the reflection of his own neatly dressed figure, that was to be seen in a mirror placed conveniently opposite.

Satisfied as the poet was, both with himself and all his appurtenances, he was far from being perfectly at ease. His feelings had been powerfully acted upon ; he had indulged in visions brighter than those of Alnaschar ; he had raised structures

more imposing than those of Solomon ; therefore it cannot be considered strange that he should be in a state of considerable excitement. Indeed it would not be exaggerating to say that he had completely intoxicated himself with his own happy fancies.

As if to divert his thoughts, he snatched from the table near him some written pages that had been placed there, and commenced reading them. This he did with so pleased and so intense an interest, that he became absorbed in the occupation. A few minutes had elapsed in this way, when a door opened ; but this did not disturb the reader.

“Lady Mary Wortley Montagu !” exclaimed his servant in a tone that would have aroused her master, even had the name not possessed the powerful spell that had so thoroughly overmastered his faculties. The poet sprung from his chair as if forced forward by an electric shock, and hurriedly replacing the manuscript on the table, advanced towards the door with as much easy dignity as it was possible for him to assume on so short a notice. At the same moment there entered his lovely visitor, apparently more fascinating in face and figure, and more attractive in dress since her return from the East than ever.

"My dear Mr. Pope!" she exclaimed, meeting him with a countenance radiant with smiles, as she held out her hand. "I am so delighted you invited me to this sweet place. It is, I protest to you, really quite a Paradise."

"Believe me, my dear Lady Mary," commenced the poet, gallantly carrying the fair hand to his lips, and bowing over it, "I consider it so far like a Paradise, since the Adam it acknowledges has received an angel for a visitor."

"Thank you, Mr. Pope," she answered with an extremely graceful curtsy, and an arch look, "a vastly pretty form of welcome, upon my word; but as I have taken a long flight from town, I suppose there can be no harm in my resting my angelic wings." Saying this, her Ladyship threw herself into the nearest chair, and taking off her hat, with the same freedom flung it upon the table.

"Ah, my dear Lady Mary," cried her host, with a gaze of rapture upon her beautiful features, "you are determined to find rest; but will you ever accord it to those whom your charms prevent from gaining any?"

"Bless my heart!" exclaimed the lady, glancing round with well-pleased surprise, "what a pretty place you've got, my dear Mr. Pope; and

all within so mighty elegant and tasteful ! On my word, I had scarcely conceived there could be any other species of dwelling for you poets than the higher stories of Grub-street. I vow there's a monstrous difference here. I'm not astonished you write such pretty verses when everything about you is so pretty. I was saying to that odious Lady Bab, t'other day, I wondered what secret you possessed for composing poetry so much superior to other people's. Lady Bab, who, you know, like your humble servant, is woefully deficient in that mighty useful commodity called brains, assured me that you were a Papist, and that the Pope had given you a dispensation, or an indulgence, plague on't, I forget which, to allow of the union of rhyme and reason, which had hitherto been considered as existing in the prohibited degrees of relationship in the writings of our modern poets."

Lady Mary laughed a very pretty laugh, that made her rosy mouth look a thousand times more enticing ; and of course Mr. Pope laughed also.

"My Lady Bab's conception is not more correct than your own assumption of mental insufficiency," he replied good-humouredly. "I certainly am what she styles a Papist ; but of dispensations

I know nothing, and of indulgences, the only one that would be useful to me, comes not from the Pontiff, but from my readers ; to whose indulgence I confess I owe obligations of no ordinary character, though I will not go so far as to say that it has had the great influence on my writings your Ladyship is pleased to attribute to it. But poets, my dear Lady Mary, have, as you ought to be aware, mighty little to do with the Holy Father in the way of inspiration. It is not to man, even the greatest and holiest, that they look for assistance. The Muse is feminine, and is sure to procure some representative whose exquisite beauty is as truly the source of everything admirable in the poet's ideas, as is the radiant sun the primary cause of beauty in the flower, and sweetness in the fruit. For myself, I can say with a safe conscience, that whatever merit my writings may lay claim to, it must have its sole origin in that unutterable adoration I have ever felt for the dear sex in general—”

“Vastly good of you, upon my honour !” exclaimed the lady, carelessly playing with her fan.

“While waiting for the adorable individual,” continued the poet with increasing fervour, “who

should condescend to separate herself from the mass of noisy worshippers, to receive the devotion of a spirit whose whole existence was bound up in his deep and faithful service."

"Lord Mr. Pope," cried Lady Mary starting up as if suddenly recognizing a portrait, "if here is not the picture of my Lord of Bolingbroke! I declare to you I passed it at first. Dear now, that I should be so stupid as not immediately to recognise so rare a likeness. Was ever such a silly wretch? I ought to be annihilated. I wonder his Lordship doesn't take me to task from the canvass; but I suppose the resemblance would not choose in anything to act unlike its well-bred original; and my Lord was ever the best of creatures to us poor women."

"Yes," added Mr. Pope, following his lively visitor to the place she had taken up opposite the picture that appeared so to have attracted her, "'tis a fine portrait of a rare original—a man with the noblest gifts and the finest faculties, who wanted only leisure to be a great philosopher as well as a distinguished statesman. Of the many noble friends it is my good fortune to possess, I look on my Lord Bolingbroke as one of whom I ought to be the most proud."

“Bless me!” exclaimed her Ladyship with a yawn, as she turned away to another object that attracted her attention, “what a sweet taste you have in china. I protest I never saw anything so charmingly ugly as these lions. My Lady Bab would give half her jointure to possess anything so curious ; as she indulges in a delightful taste for collecting all the monstrosities she can meet with, and she now boasts of being able to beat any collection in the kingdom in the ugliness of her museum. You *must* go there, Mr. Pope.”

Now the last sentence was said in the simplest manner in the world. Yet any one less in love by a great deal than her companion, might have detected a satirical tone that gave quite a different meaning to it, to that which it appeared to possess.

Lady Mary then made the round of the room, in the most animated way criticising this and commenting on that—her host following her erratic movements as closely as he conveniently could, explaining where explanation was needed, and by a number of amusing anecdotes in some way or other connected with the different things that excited his beautiful visitor’s observation, endeavouring to entertain her. If anything could

be judged from the many bewitching smiles she bestowed upon him, and the innumerable little bursts of mirth that proceeded from her, his success could scarcely be doubted.

Her Ladyship seemed the very impersonation of happiness, and possessed of an inexhaustible flow of spirits, that could only have fair play with so intelligent a companion ; whilst of him it might truly be said, mortal man could not be better satisfied with himself, or more certain that the ravishing creature beside him was as much his own in heart and soul as if she had already confessed it.

He increased his efforts to please, never failing, however, on every occasion that presented itself, in some indirect way to express the feelings that her Ladyship had so powerfully excited. His gallantry, warm as it sometimes seemed, was never checked. Perhaps it was replied to by some such exclamation as "provoking creature !" "tormenting devil !" "I protest, Mr. Pope, you are vastly complimentary !" "surely no woman ever resisted such monstrous fine things !" or any of the thousand and one little speeches to which pretty women have recourse when listening to a suitor who is not disagreeable to them.

At last when the circuit of the room had been made, and everything had received its due share of attention, and had contributed its quota to the very lively conversation that was going on, Lady Mary snatched up her hat as unceremoniously as she had thrown it down, and hastily putting it on before a mirror, declared her intention of viewing the garden. Her host, all complaisance and gallantry, immediately acceded to her whim, with various compliments suitable to the occasion; and opening the glass doors they were quickly upon the lawn.

This was a new scene for the display of the lady's intense enjoyment; and as she beheld the beautiful arrangement of the flowers and trees, the lawns and paths so different to the old-fashioned garden plots with which she was familiar; her satisfaction burst forth in the most enthusiastic terms. She admired everything, she commended everything, and she was delighted with everything.

The poet as he walked by her side, appreciating her graceful gestures, and basking in her sunny smiles as to his enamoured fancy, her Ladyship floated amongst the flowers like some creature of a fairer world, was in the seventh heaven of

ecstasy. His step became elastic, his spirit elevated, and his voice unusually musical and tender, as he gave expression to the various classical ideas that crowded upon his mind, arising from the presence of so lovely a being among objects so full of beautiful associations.

Every flower that attracted her attention was immediately gathered, and presented to her with some well-expressed flattery, for which the imagery of the best poets of Greece and Rome was laid under contribution; and every observation seemed to lead to some peculiarly felicitous reference to the most sentimental legends connected with the heathen mythology. Lady Mary was quite at home in these scholastic compliments; and by her own allusions to the poets of the ancient world and their graceful fictions, contrived to keep up this pleasant strain during the whole of the time she remained in the garden.

To listen to the conversation, it would be impossible to imagine two minds so completely in unison. They appeared to think, and they appeared to feel alike; at least, so far they went together in admiration of the beautiful, and in a sympathy for all the tender impressions that arise from its contemplation. There was, or seemed a

visible rapture moistening the brilliant eyes of the Town Beauty, as she attended to her eloquent companion, when a more poetical flight than ordinary took him from his fervent recollections of Ovid, to some picturesque reference to Theocritus; and as for the Poet, nothing could exceed the transport which his every look and word expressed. In the course of this animated colloquy he had ventured to utter many intimations of the passion his fair visitor had excited; and though she replied to them in a manner as if they were mere matters of conversation, he felt assured from her eloquent looks that they had made a proper impression.

In this humour they returned to the house. During their absence a slight but elegant repast had been prepared for them, which Lady Mary hailed with quite as much satisfaction as she had expressed at beholding what she had already seen, and with amazing alacrity seemed ready to divest herself of all the exquisite ideas in which she had lately been indulging, to devote her attention to the more solid gratifications now offered for her enjoyment.

Her companion did the honours of the feast with not less tenderness than hospitality; and she chose to show that she had a tongue as well

as teeth ; for while she attacked the breast of a chicken with something more than a fine lady's appetite, she rattled on in as lively a fashion as ever respecting what she had seen, and how delighted she was, and anything and everything she could contrive to talk about ; whilst her lover sat opposite to her too greatly excited by her fascinations to pay as much attention to his own share of the banquet, but drinking wine with his visitor and quoting Anacreon, and bringing forth the most sparkling witticisms, the most sententious thoughts, and the most poetical ideas that could be brought in in any way to advance his object.

Everything evidently encouraged the hope he so strongly entertained ; and the moment seemed approaching for him to make the decisive demonstration that should establish his triumph. Lady Mary ate and drank, and laughed and talked, as though the present moment was the happiest she had known. But a fine lady's appetite, even when excited by a pleasant walk, must at last be satisfied ; and after leaving the chicken for the patties, and the patties for the cheesecakes, her Ladyship appeared about to conclude with a last glass of wine, which the attentive host was pouring out for her, whilst quoting a French epigram more remarkable for its

wit than its delicacy, which she evidently enjoyed with no ordinary zest.

“Come, Mr. Pope, it’s vastly ungenteel of you not to have offered me music with your banquet,” she observed, after putting down her glass. “But I see,” she added, pointing to a lute placed beside a chair, “you have provided an instrument, though not a musician. Egad, I wonder you were not satisfied with merely furnishing the decanters and so saved your wine.” She laughed one of her merry laughs at this.

“Your voice, my dear Lady Mary, is to me a music St. Cecilia could not have rivalled,” replied the poet.

“Oh, your humble servant!” answered the lady. “But as my voice is expected to do duty on this occasion instead of the customary flutes and haut-boys, harps and dulcimers; I think it might be employed more harmoniously than in replying to the legion of immensely pretty speeches you have been so good as to make to me since my arrival. As music I am determined to have, I shall make a virtue of necessity, and so honour you by supplying it myself.”

Her delighted host hastened to bring the lute, for which Lady Mary had risen from her chair, and

was commencing a speech suited to such a moment, as he placed it in her hands.

“My dear Mr. Pope!” she exclaimed, running her fingers lightly over the strings, and carefully tuning them, “I am about to sing you a love song; and it is one that ought to be well regarded by every member of our weak sex, likely to come within the influence of man’s beguiling tongue.”

There was a world of arch mockery in the lady’s very brilliant eyes, as this sentence was expressed by her; but before her companion could reply to this *badinage*, she struck a few chords, and in extremely sweet and plaintive tones, commenced:—

THE DESPAIRING SHEPHERDESS.

The silly sheep upon the mead,

Now wander where there may;

What them befall I take no heed,

I care not if they stray.

I hie me to some secret nook,

That’s hid from ev’ry eye;

And there I lay aside my crook,

And there I sit and sigh.

My eyes have long been dim with grief.

My cheek is wan and pale;

My heart is as the autumn leaf,

That sports upon the gale.

Gone, gone ! is all the fond delight,
In happier hours it knew ;
And fled its dreams so fair and bright,
Since Damon proved untrue.

The lark shall sing above my head,
His requiem clear and sweet ;
The green-grass turf shall be my bed,
The earth my winding sheet.
And on the stone upon me laid,
These words my fate shall tell :—
“ Here rests at peace, a wretched maid,
Who lived, and loved—too well !”

The singer gave the ballad all its proper expression ; but doleful as it was, it seemed either to be foreign to her nature, or else assumed in mockery :—for no one could gaze on her beautifully expressive face, without perceiving that a struggle was there going on between the mirthful mood that was so natural to her, and the melancholy one she had only taken up with the melancholy ditty she was singing.

The struggle lasted however only as long as the song, for at the conclusion, the former triumphed very audibly, much to the relief of the listener, who would have better liked sentiments less despairing. He joined in the laugh as heartily as

his companion, and rallied her on her rustic taste in ballads; vowed she would enchant the milkmaids by singing them so touching a strain, and protested the words were most unnatural, because it was quite impossible any Damon could be untrue to her. Then he launched out on the subject of the extreme felicity that must be the lot of so favoured a mortal, and how extraordinary ought to be the devotion to her of the happy man distinguished by her regard. This led to a long and earnest speech on the happiness arising from mutual attachment, and instances were given coloured with the most poetical imagery of the supreme bliss enjoyed by those connected by such ties. But where as he proceeded to state, the intellect was joined with the heart, the permanency and fervour of the affections were increased a hundred fold; and he alluded to the love of poets for their mistresses which had crowned both with an imperishable renown, referring to Petrarch and Laura, and to Dante and Beatrice, in language of the most impassioned tenderness.

The brilliant eyes of his fair visitor, shone more lustrously upon him than ever, and her smile appeared to have acquired a sweeter expression, as she with an audible sigh expressed how prodigiously she envied Laura such a lover, and how

undeservedly she thought he had been rewarded for his devotion.

This acknowledgment completely thrust aside the restraint the poet had hitherto contrived to put on his all-absorbing passion ; and in an instant he was in the most graceful attitude he could put himself into, at the knees of Lady Mary, with eyes flashing with exultation, and breast throbbing with pleasure, pouring out a resistless tide of the most enamoured language to which fond poet ever gave expression. He had taken her hand, he had covered it with burning kisses ; he had called her the most endearing names to be found in the copious vocabulary of Love ; and he had vowed to devote himself, heart and soul, to her happiness, and to exert the best energies of his brain to do her honour.

The poet was running on in the most passionate declaration poet ever expressed ; words scarcely seeming to come fast enough, so rapid was the flow of his ideas ; when pausing to take breath, his attention was caught by sounds, which the engrossing nature of his occupation and the position of his face continually pressed to the hand he had so fondly seized, had previously prevented him from hearing ; and looking up, his con-

sternation may be imagined, when he beheld the lovely object of his worship vainly striving with her disengaged hand to stifle a fit of irrepressible laughter that had seized her.

The impassioned lover was on his feet in a moment, wearing a look as opposite as darkness is to light, to the adoration that a moment since illumined every feature.

“Lord, Mr. Pope!” exclaimed the lady, now giving full scope to her mischievous mirth, as she rose from her chair, and rapidly threw on her things, “I vow and protest I never was so entertained in all my life! If I live an age I shall never forget it. You must surely have been taking lessons, or you never could have gone through the scene with such prodigious cleverness.”

Another burst of laughter proceeded from her as she hastily prepared for departure, whilst her imprudent admirer stood scowling before her, struck dumb with mortification and astonishment.

“Your most obedient, my dear Mr. Pope!” she added in her sweetest tones, curtsying to him as she opened the door. He acknowledged the civility, by a haughty bend of the head; his heart

being a prey to the fiercest passions that torture humanity. "I am monstrously afraid I shall never be sufficiently grateful for all the fine compliments I have received from you; but I can safely say, I shall never forget this pleasant visit. Once more, Mr. Pope, your most obedient."

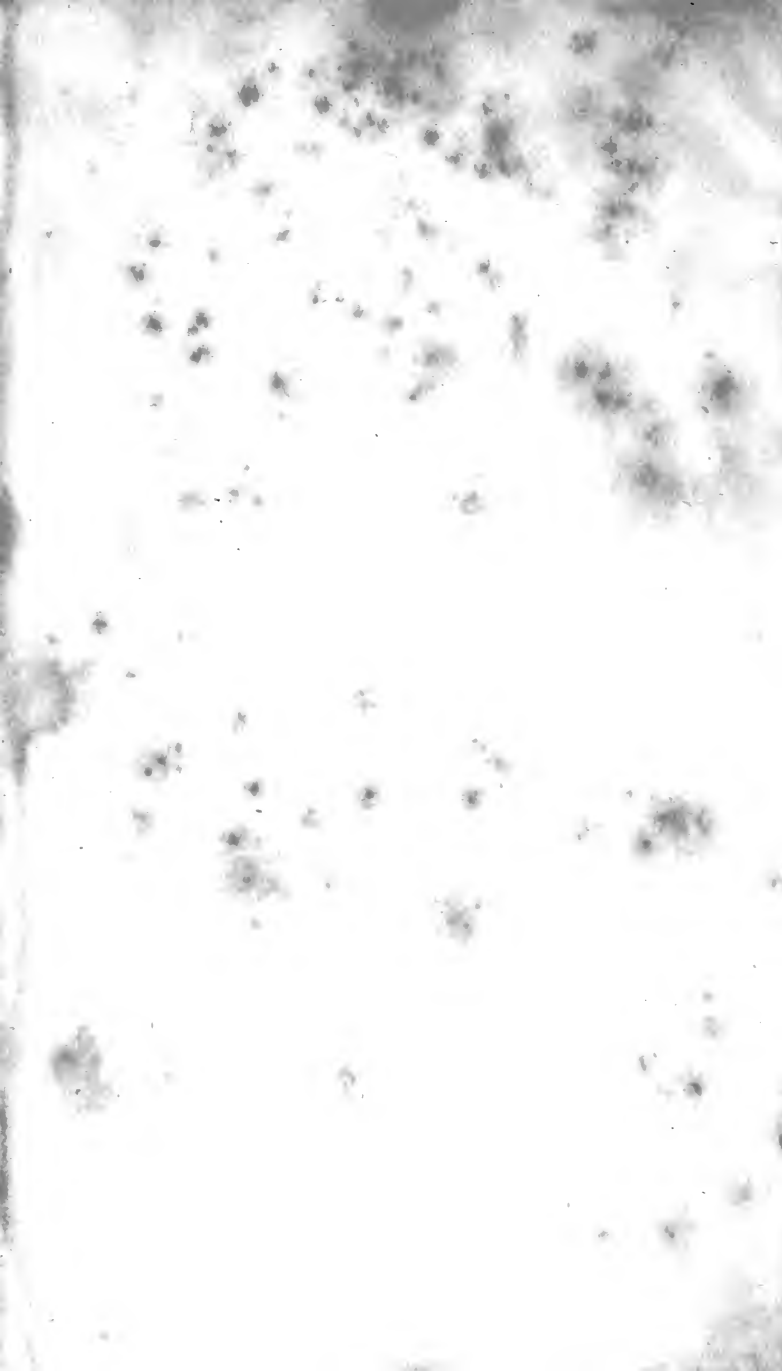
The door opened, and closed. Lady Mary was soon in her sedan, and carried by her bearers to the water-side, where the chair was received in a boat; but the pretty jilt was some distance on her return to town, before the lately so deeply enamoured poet recovered his speech with a hearty execration, and sunk on his chair, as though he felt himself bruised even to the heart.

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